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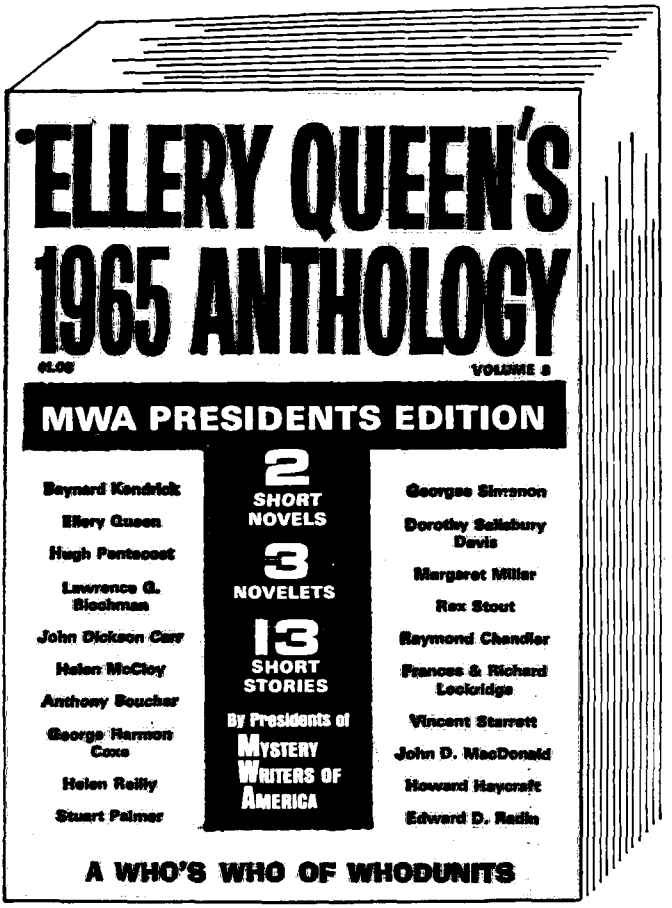

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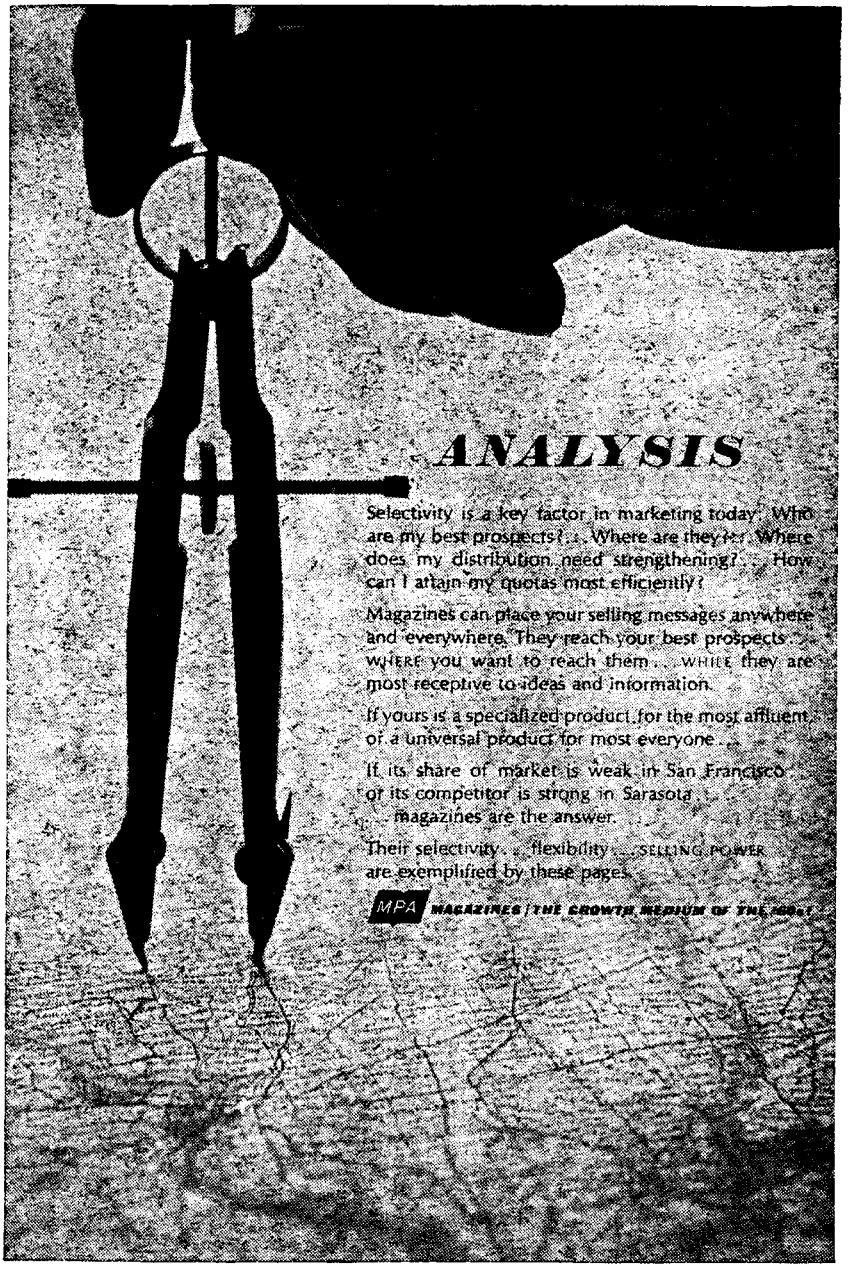
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Mystery Magazine

ISSUE NO. 250

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To celebrate Issue Number 250 of EQMM we have held back the publication of our Story Purchase Number 3000—somehow the two figures seem to go together . . . and Story Number 3000 is indeed unusual enough to commemorate a milestone issue. It is the tale of a 64,000,000,000-to-1 chance—64 billion *to one. Would you bet on those odds even in this world of electronic computers and scientifically processed statistics? Would you?*

THE PERFECT STRANGER

by RUFUS KING

On NOVEMBER 7TH OF LAST YEAR, in the small Gold Coast town of Halcyon, Florida, the lives of three casual friends were brought to a focal point in a homicide case, the aftermath of which was to shake them to the foundation of their beings. It would leave a question in their lives to which none of them could find a conclusive answer.

Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that none of them *dared* to to answer the question . . .

One of the three was Agnes Cacherton (60, spinster, multimillionaire), who stood observing the flat coast of Florida's southeastern shore from the afterdeck of her yacht *Eastern Star*. She felt mildly bilious from, she thought, a slight attack of indigestion. The stone crabs at lunch? Possibly.

She said to Captain Svensen, who stood rocklike at the rail beside her, "We shall lie at anchor, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"We will make Halcyon in about an hour."

Miss Cacherton turned from the rail and her attention was held by the southern sky, which rose as a chiffon vault of Nile green over the evening horizon. A single star looked back at her, as hypnotic in its brilliance as a notable gem displayed in

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a jeweler's window. Slowly, perhaps under the star's compelling influence, her sense of malaise increased. It hovered beyond mere indigestion, and subconsciously she compared it with a similar experience which had come over her in the Museum of Antiquities at Būláq, a suburb of Cairo, in the year that her father had died—indeed, only a short while before his death.

"Are you a superstitious man?" she asked. "Omens, portents, such things, Captain?"

Svensen's voice held the gentle lilt of his native country, ever surprising from such a monolithic bulk of muscle. "I like to think I am not, but I am. Most sailors are. You cannot help it when you find yourself alone with all the empty sea." His eyes, which were of a distant blue, studied her briefly. "Is there something that is bothering you?"

"A feeling—no more."

He did not immediately question her about it. He did not need to. Since her father's death, twenty years ago, when she had offered him the command of the *Eastern Star*, they had come to be friends, and he felt that he had at last begun to understand her.

The *Eastern Star* was distinctly a luxury yacht—Diesel-powered, 191 tons—of a breed rapidly approaching the extinct. Old Mr. Cacherton had had her built back in 1935, shortly after the largest of his oil strikes in Texas. Her fittings reflected a nostalgic longing of his youth when he had been tremendously impressed by a boating magazine's description of the luxuries that had been installed (by a Captain Crowninshield, one of America's pioneer yacht owners) in a dreamboat which, aptly, had been christened *Cleopatra's Barge*.

Like the *Eastern Star*, Miss Cacherton was somewhat of an anachronism—in the sense that she seemed to belong to no fenced-in period in time. Her interests lay largely in the past, and her preoccupation with archaeological research had led her to sponsor and accompany digs in Egypt, Peru, and last spring—an especially rewarding one—in Israel. None of her finds and artifacts was of any earth-shaking value, and the governments involved had given her permission to form them into a personal collection—at, in most instances, reasonable prices. This collection she kept aboard the *Eastern Star*. It amounted to a hobby—to lend this interesting but relatively unimportant *Collectanea Cacherton*, as she dubbed it, for exhibit at occasional charity drives. It was a harmless and well-meaning gesture—just as she herself was a harmless and well-meaning woman.

"This feeling," Captain Svensen said, "Is it like a premonition? Yes? Then I will tell you this—you cannot do all of those things that you have done, this grubbing about in the magics and the beliefs of the oldest years, without some of it rubbing off on you."

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"I suppose it's a form of archeological osmosis, and it's not happening only to me. I think many people are swinging back to it—back to the unexplained, I mean. Not charlatanism, you understand, but a sound scientific approach. The experiments at Duke University, for example, in extrasensory perception."

"Always it is so—or so it seems in troubled times. Take that TV program, *The Twilight Zone*. It is accepted by many viewers—by *me*—with but the smallest grain of salt."

All this was far afield from homicide and could have gone on indefinitely, purposelessly; but it was to create a mood that would hang like a vapor over the coming tragedy, and to intensify into a strange climax when the search, which followed the shooting, came to an end.

Miss Cacherton tried to shake off the disturbing humor. "There will be," she said, "two cases of the artifacts. Possibly three. Dr. Llados is packing them now."

The man whose destiny it was to fire the fatal shot was named Jermyn Laffkin. His age, 33. Although of excellent family and background, his body and appearance suggested the blear of a far-gone alcoholic. His physique and brain were pitted with the maggots of a virulent discontent, the sum total of which was focused against his older brother Hillman. It was Hillman at whom he planned to fire the gun.

In an oblique and entirely unintentional fashion it was Hillman's fault that this was so. Both men had been reared in that economic and social climate generally tagged with the cliché of "being born to the purple." They had been orphaned at an early age, and the Laffkin wealth placed for their later direct control with the Agrarian Trust of New York.

A more personal guardianship had been deputized by the bank to a well-meaning but totally incompetent maiden aunt, a Miranda Laffkin, their late father's sister. Nothing much need be known about this woman beyond her avid passion for meringue glacés, a conviction that music had died with Carrie Jacobs Bond, and a justified reputation for being the worst bridge player in Manhattan.

Fortunately, she had little to do. The Laffkin house in the East Sixties off Fifth Avenue was run by a competent housekeeper, with all expenditures being taken care of by Agrarian, including ample allowances to Miranda and the two heirs.

The brothers were enrolled in Groton; Hillman went on to Harvard, and for his doctorate in science, to M.I.T. Jermyn, however, retired from his scholastic education during his junior year at Groton. By request of the school authorities.

There would be a strong temptation to draw a parallel between the Laffkin brothers and those earlier brothers, Cain and Abel; but to do

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so seems superficial. After the shooting, however, the nation's news media did not fail to play up that angle. Actually, the one definite point of similarity lay in Jermyn's corroding, ever-strengthening, and finally murderous jealousy of his brother Hillman, who was always the dominant and lauded one of the pair.

In the simplest of terms, Hillman had turned out to become a world-acclaimed scientific genius and benefactor whereas Jermyn, with equally smashing success, had turned out to become a bum. Psychiatrists could (and did) give lengthy analyses of the causes for this—but these probings have nothing to do with the true mystery of this strange case and so, thankfully, can be skipped.

On the 6th of November (the day before the fateful 7th) Jermyn Laffkin flew from New York to Miami, from where he taxied to Halcyon and registered at The Surf—a beach motel, located within easy walking distance of the Halcyon Auditorium. In the auditorium, on the following evening, would take place the opening night of a week-long Festival of the Arts. This affair was being sponsored by the combined church organizations of the state as the entering wedge in a drive to raise funds for a nonsectarian children's hospital and clinic. The head of the committee for this drive was the Catholic prelate, Monsignor Lavigny, whose home was in Halcyon and whose sincerity, benevolence, and general good works were a legend.

Jermyn Laffkin's interest in the arts or in the Festival was nonexistent. All that interested this wretched psychopathic misfit was the knowledge that his brother Hillman, an overnight guest of Monsignor Lavigny, would deliver a brief speech at the first-night ceremonies of the Festival.

Jermyn had decided to kill Hillman during that speech—when his brother would be standing on the threshold of a high point in his brilliant career. This also had nothing to do with the arts or with the Festival. Rather, it involved Hillman's going by Pan-Am jet on the following day to Lisbon and thence to Geneva where, later in the month, he would disclose before a world convocation of scientists the fruits of his research with breeder reactors and nuclear energy. This research was strictly along nonmilitant lines —a more practical and far cheaper method, for example, of converting salt water into fresh.

In his room at The Surf, Jermyn assured himself that the door was locked against the evening dusk, that the jalousies were closed, and the curtains drawn. He unpacked. From a meager assortment of travel necessities he selected a black silk scarf, already knotted to form a sling, and a .38 Police Positive. Before a full-length mirror set in the bathroom door he adjusted the sling around his neck and arranged its

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bottom fold around his right hand and the gun.

It was a satisfactory device, admittedly hackneyed in its conception; but it would serve Jermyn's purpose.

He repacked the sling and the gun in the suitcase and locked the bag. At the motel office he inquired as to the location of the nearest tavern. On his way to the tavern he disregarded the serene beauty of the southern sky which still displayed, in its vault of pale Nile green, the single star . . .

The morning of the fateful 7th of November broke with the customary Florida aplomb of enveloping sunshine, with a fanning breeze by courtesy of the trade wind, and, lightly glittering over much of Halcyon, with the general stir of activity usually found in a town that shortly would be celebrating a Festival of the Arts.

By 9 o'clock: Miss Cacherton, accompanied by her *Collectanea's* curator, Dr. Llados, was busy in the auditorium arranging, in the Ancient Arts Section, her assortment of artifacts and discoveries. In addition to groupings of Egyptian, Peruvian, and Israeli potteries, there were especially displayed an Egyptian alabaster vase of the sixth dynasty (circa 2600 B.C.), some small arts of faïence-making from the Middle Kingdom, and a Diorite bowl of the fourth dynasty. Her malaise of the previous evening had vanished and she was looking forward pleasurably to lunching at the home of her old and dear friend, Monsignor Lavigny. It had been at his request that she had agreed to present her exhibit.

By 9 o'clock: Jermyn Laffkin, in The Surf motel, sat breakfasting in his room on straight bourbon over ice, while gleaning from a column covering the Festival—on Page 1 of the *Halcyon Sun*—that his brother Hillman, noted physicist and Nobel prize-winner, would be among the notables at the opening ceremony, said list to include celebrated political figures, important members of the social colony, church dignitaries, and, as the official ribbon-cutter, Miss Agnes Cacherton, socialite and amateur archeologist.

Jermyn's morning jitters were beginning to calm down—after the fourth drink—and he could now raise the glass to his lips without spilling half its contents. He started to feel the anodyne of an exquisite peace that the plunk of a bullet into Hillman's hide would bring him. It can be accepted literally that whatever happened to him afterward, Jermyn did not really care. His infested brain had been eaten to the extent where it could embrace nothing beyond one single overpowering objective—and that was his older brother's death. Beyond that end to his jealous hatred his last shreds of reasoning refused to look.

He could scarcely wait for night to fall.

By 9 o'clock: Monsignor Lavigny, in the garden of his pleasant estate,

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sat at a table beneath the fernlike spread of a poinciana tree; he was finishing a breakfast of iced mango, broiled lamb kidneys with bacon, English muffins, and tea into which, as a gesture to his general well-being, he had introduced a dollop of Jamaica rum. In appearance, the prelate bore a startling resemblance to Walter Hampden's stage make-up for the role of Cardinal Richelieu in, let it hastily be said, the cardinal's more seraphic rather than more Machiavellian mood.

A Cuban houseboy with liquid horse-chestnut eyes and the movements of an activated steel spring informed him that he was wanted by long-distance telephonic communication from New York City by a man who announced himself as being a Senor Hillman Laffkin.

"I do hope, Hillman," Monsignor Lavigny said, when he had gone inside and picked up the receiver, "that this doesn't mean you can't come?"

"No," Hillman's voice said, "I'll be leaving from Idlewild shortly after noon."

"In that case, good morning to you, and we can now indulge in pleasantries. How are you, dear friend? And what in the name of your favorite saint are you calling me about?"

"I'm worried about Jermyn."

"Ah, yes." Monsignor Lavigny was fully aware of that situation. "Just what is he up to now?"

"I'm not quite sure—but I don't think it's good. This Geneva clambake seems to have got under his skin more than usual, almost driving him straight off his rocker. I *think* that's at the bottom of it—the kudos, the éclat, big brother all but being canonized for his service to humanity—you know what I mean."

"I do. But outside of kidnaping or murdering you, I don't see what Jermyn could do about it. Would he?"

"Kill me?" Hillman's laugh had a sharp bite. "No, his mind doesn't work that way. What's left of it. Unpleasant practical jokes, so-called pranks, and embarrassing me in public—those are more in his line. Some of them were pretty unfunny—one almost did me in, as a matter of fact. Only last month he managed to get inside the lab and juggle a couple of elements in an experiment I was working on. Almost blew the place up, and me with it."

Monsignor Lavigny exclaimed, and felt, his grave concern. "Why," he asked, "didn't it?"

"Funny thing about that. My assistant phoned me on the intercom that a man was calling who had to see me immediately on a 'matter of gravest importance.' I went outside and was just shaking hands with this perfect stranger when the explosion went off. In the confusion—and I don't blame him after that sort of reception—the man must have decided to get out of there and fast. I never saw him again, and naturally

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never found out what the matter of 'gravest importance' was. I feel obligated to the guy for at least a limb or two, perhaps even for my life."

"And Jermyn?"

"Oh, he admitted it—went to pieces, the way only he can, and does. Claimed he had only wanted to 'spoil' my experiment, hadn't realized for a minute what the results would be—so forgive, forgive, forgive."

"And you forgave."

"He's my brother," Hillman said flatly. "Morally, it was I who had the responsibility of raising him, setting his goals, being an example." His voice grew bitter with self-distaste. "I set them, all right. Too high. I can see that now, not only because of the results, but from a better understanding of myself as I was then. Acting the proxy father, principally by trying to be a shining example. I guess what I really seemed to Jermyn was a shining example of an overstuffed shirt."

"You must not blame yourself. You did your best because you sincerely believed it to be the best. And now?"

"As I said, I don't know. Jermyn left here yesterday, taking a suitcase, and one of the servants overheard him telephoning Idlewild for a reservation for Miami. It's an even chance he's holed in somewhere around Miami right now."

"I see."

"Exactly. Cooking up heaven knows what. Halcyon's only a stone's throw away and I have the feeling that Halcyon is just where he is. It's as much for your sake as for mine that I'm worried. Whatever Jermyn is planning, it will probably be for the opening ceremony of your Festival tonight. I'd bet on that."

"Yes, you may be right." (Monsignor Lavigny was later to reflect, with a chill, on how casual, how all but academic, this conversation with Hillman had seemed at the time.) "Have you anything specific to suggest?"

"Yes. I know you've had several dealings with the authorities, that you have been of practical service to them on at least two occasions of which you've told me. Perhaps they would reciprocate?"

"I'm sure of it. Especially one friend, the chief criminal investigator for the Sheriff's Bureau. A young man by the name of Stuff Driscoll."

"Stuff? I hope the nickname isn't pertinent?"

"Anything but. He claims it would take a psychiatrist to unearth how he got it. Some terrible trauma in his early childhood, no doubt, all of which is beside the point. Just what would you suggest we do, Hillman? Have Jermyn located and picked up? It can be done, you know. There's a blanket charge called vagrancy which covers almost every form of human behavior in the book."

"No, not picked up. Decidedly no. But I would like to have him located."

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"And then?"

"Well, watched. Just to have an eye kept on him until I shove off tomorrow by Pan-Am on the first leg to Geneva."

"Look here, tell me this honestly, Hillman. Do you feel there is something more to this than a practical joke in bad taste. Something perhaps more serious?"

For a few moments Hillman did not answer, and when he did speak, Monsignor Lavigny detected the obvious strain in his voice. "No, there couldn't be. Never intentionally. Not my own brother."

Monsignor Lavigny refrained from pointing out the fallacy of such fraternal confidence. Instead he said, "I think I understand what you want, and I suggest, Hillman, that you leave the situation in our hands."

After the courtesies of goodbye, Monsignor Lavigny called the Sheriff's Bureau and was informed that most probably he could get in touch with Stuff Driscoll at his home in Fort Lauderdale.

Monsignor Lavigny did reach him there.

The afternoon was approaching the brief hour of evening that precedes the subtropic night. There had been no difficulty on Stuff Driscoll's part in locating the *pied-à-terre* of the potential practical joker—for such, and only such, was Jermyn Laffkin still accepted to be.

Unfortunately, Jermyn remained an absentee so far as his person was concerned. He was not at The Surf. An inspection of his room disclosed nothing beyond the suitcase and personal effects, with the addition of an empty bourbon bottle in the waste basket and one still half filled on the dresser top. The suitcase was empty.

At Stuff's suggestion, a Deputy Sheriff was left at the motel to await Jermyn's return and, if he did return, to keep him under surveillance. There was nothing ex-officio about this arrangement—the success and orderly conduct of the Festival, particularly with the crowd of celebrities vulnerable to any unpleasant experiences from pickpocketing to a crank bomb scare, were of official concern. The surveillance of a possible prankster, of a scale for which Jermyn was noted, still remained little more than a precautionary detail in the large protective net with which official departments were covering the event.

The reason the .38 Police Positive and the scarf sling were not found in the suitcase was simply owing to the fact that Jermyn had them with him —the gun under his waistband, sheltered by the overhang of an Hawaiian sports shirt, and the scarf crumpled up in a pocket of his Bermuda shorts.

He had passed the morning hours since ten in an indifferent sampling of the more inconspicuous taverns, and the process continued throughout the afternoon. His preoccupa-

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tion with his main purpose—the killing of his brother—was still uppermost. Only on the surface of his perception was he aware of his appearance as an habitual lush nipping along with a bottomless capacity and of the changing tavern scene.

As to the consequences of his proposed action—in the sense that his brother's death would bring an incalculable loss to the world—on this score his perception continued to be a blank. He neither considered nor cared about the work in which Hillman was so dedicatedly engaged—the diverting of the power of the atom from a conceivable annihilation of mankind into peaceful and utilitarian channels for the benefit of all men.

None of these values touched Jermyn's consciousness as the daylight hours methodically passed by and while liquor was added, negligently, to his system.

At 8 o'clock that night the scene of the shooting was set.

The large and impressive lobby of the auditorium, with its Greek architectural motif, became filled with a leisurely moving crowd of notables, non-notables, and members of the various news media, all on hand for the speeches and the ribbon-cutting ceremony after which the main doors to the Exhibition Hall would be swung open and the Festival of the Arts declared officially in progress.

A portable dais, which in reality was little more than an oversize footstool, served to raise the speaker of the moment a head or so above the crowd. Before it stood the inevitable microphone to carry the speeches to an overflow of people gathered outside on the auditorium grounds. Trained on the dais were the usual floodlights for visual recording, with one direct spotlight to pinpoint the speaker's face.

The speeches, mercifully, were limited to three—Monsignor Lavigny, for the combined church organizations; Hillman Laffkin, for the value and need to bolster scientific educational facilities for the youth of Florida; and Governor Ainstree Hollingsborne, whose dulcet voice would generalize on the state's great present and greater future and, in passing, on his administration and himself.

Agnes Cacherton would then, with a slender pair of gold-plated scissors, cut a gold satin ribbon that stretched its frail barrier across the doors to the Exhibition Hall.

Such, at least, was the arranged plan.

The plan proceeded on schedule through and shortly following the conclusion of Monsignor Lavigny's talk. During the prelate's opening remarks Stuff Driscoll, from his position beside Hillman Laffkin, caught a view in the attentive crowd of the Deputy Sheriff whose assigned duty had been to keep Jermyn Laffkin under surveillance.

Both men caught each other's eye

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The Deputy nodded in affirmation, and indicated a man who stood a couple of rows before him in the crowd. So that, Stuff realized, was the practical joker, Jermyn Laffkin. His appearance resembled that of his brother Hillman only in a manner travestied by the consumption of excessive alcohol. His right forearm rested in a black silk sling.

It was at this point that Stuff experienced a first seedling of alarm—the dim notion that something more than a minor disturbance or a moment of public embarrassment might be in the wind. The black silk sling? He ruled out pot shots through the gently milling and attentively listening people. But how about the time when Hillman Laffkin would mount the dais and stand alone, a target poised on a higher level with an open area in front of the dais?

Unobtrusively, Stuff closed in until he stood only two persons removed from Jermyn's side.

Monsignor Lavigny's voice went into the coda of his speech, dropped to silence, and the prelate stood smiling for a few moments, acknowledging applause. He then introduced, as the next speaker, Mr. Hillman Laffkin. Monsignor Lavigny stepped down from the dais. Hillman, amid a welcoming ripple of hand clapping, stepped onto the dais.

There were two shots.

And two men fell dead.

Statement made by the Deputy Sheriff on the scene: "First I noticed Stuff—I mean, Mr. Driscoll—closing in on the nut's other side, so I figured we had him well covered. Then the spotlight focused on Hillman Laffkin as he stepped onto the dais and I guess it was impulsive to look straight at him for just a moment. When my attention went back to his nut brother again, the guy had edged forward to the front line of spectators, so I took after him. He stepped out into the clear space and I saw him whip a gun out from that arm sling and aim smack at his brother on the dais. So I pulled out my gun and shot him dead center in the back just as *he* pulled the trigger. It would sure as hell have been curtains for that Hillman Laffkin if . . ."

Stuff Driscoll's statement: "As soon as Deputy Charles Hartland identified Jermyn Laffkin to me I moved over and took a stand on the opposite side of Jermyn. As the Deputy has testified, the spotlight pinpointing Hillman Laffkin also distracted my attention—to the dais and away from Jermyn Laffkin's edging forward through the crowd. There was such a suddenness about the shooting that it would have been physically impossible for either the Deputy or myself to have leaped on Jermyn Laffkin in time to prevent him from firing. There is no question whatever that if it had not been for . . ."

Hillman Laffkin's statement: "There was a partially blinding ef-

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fect when that spotlight was directed full at me. I was conscious of the open floor space in front of the dais, backed by the semicircle of spectators. I noticed a man stepping out toward the clearing and recognized him as my brother. You must realize that all of it happened within a few seconds at the most. I had a sense of shock when my brother whipped out and raised the gun. Where the second man came from—from what section of the crowd—I do not know. My attention was riveted on the gun in my brother's hand. The other man—the stranger—leaped between us at the instant my brother fired, taking the bullet that had been meant for me. The Deputy Sheriff fired his gun almost simultaneously, and both my brother and the stranger dropped dead."

Reporter: "Is it a fact that you recognized the man?"

Hillman: "Yes, I recognized him—from an experience that occurred a month ago in my laboratory in New York. But I do not know him—he is a perfect stranger. Even though I don't know his name or anything about him, this is the second time I find myself in his debt—and this time it's a debt that I don't know how I shall ever be able to repay. Why did a perfect stranger make this sacrifice for me? The greatest sacrifice one man can ever make for another. Why?"

Reporter: "Maybe we'll find the answer to that, Mr. Laffkin, when his identity is established."

It was announced over the public address system that the Festival would remain closed for the rest of the evening, but would be opened informally to the public starting at ten o'clock the following morning—and would those who had gathered in the lobby and on the grounds please be good enough to leave as quickly as possible. There had been shock, and some minor panicking, but as a whole the crowd had remained orderly and the place was soon cleared.

Various officials (Medical Examiner, police, lab technicians) then went through the formality of executing their several functions. They did so with efficiency, but merely for the record. Obviously the case was closed. Nothing remained except to establish the stranger's identity and the motive for his sacrifice, both questions being of little more than academic interest to the authorities. Photographs were taken of the dead stranger, and sets of his fingerprints were registered.

One oddity did puzzle the official minds: no identification could be found in the dead man's pockets—no scrap of paper, no letters, no cards of any kind. All labels had been removed from clothing that was obviously new. No laundry marks were in evidence and invisible ones, if they existed, would have to be brought out later in laboratory tests.

As the evening neared ten o'clock a small group gathered in the patio

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of Monsignor Lavigny's home. It comprised the prelate, Hillman Laffkin, Miss Cacherton, her curator Dr. Llados, and Stuff Driscoll. The night, the *mise en scène*, offered an oasis of deep calm after the emotional eruptions following the two deaths. The air was soft with the pale fragrance of jasmine, and on small tables beside the patio chairs stood various drinks which the houseboy had served.

"You must not regard me," Hillman said, "as being heavy with grief. It would be hypocritical to pretend that I am. I am sure Monsignor Lavigny understands. But I am obsessed with the stranger. Who was he? And why did he do it? I understand, Mr. Driscoll, that he carried no identification whatever?"

"Nothing on his person, Mr. Laffkin."

"Then where does that leave us? What can we do?"

"Publicity, for one thing. You must realize that our local TV cameramen caught on-the-scene shots. The tapes are sensational enough to be broadcast nation-wide. Other news media will certainly carry the man's picture. There's an excellent chance that some relative or friend will recognize the man and let us know."

"But if not?"

"His fingerprints will be processed."

"In what way?"

"Locally here, and also teletyped to the Central Bureau files."

Hillman's voice held a touch of indignation. "But aren't such records those of criminals? Surely a man who did what that man did—"

"There is this to consider," Stuff interrupted gently. "Removal of all means of identification from one's person presupposes that there is something to conceal."

"I don't believe it," Hillman said firmly.

"No, it's not impossible, Mr. Laffkin. His action tonight could easily be that of a fanatic—what the French with greater definition label 'the exalted mind.' As for the Washington files being only those of criminal records, that isn't so. There are many other categories. We'll put this stranger's prints through a cross-classification. Incidentally, on that former occasion you spoke about—when he came to your lab in New York—did he speak with any sort of foreign accent?"

Hillman thought back. "He said nothing, as I remember—the explosion came too soon. As for any accent, I simply don't know. Why?"

"Just another possible source of identification. Aliens are registered and fingerprinted. And finally, there's Interpol."

There was an interruption at this moment from an unexpected quarter—from Dr. Llados who had been listening intently while nursing a Planter's Punch and puffing on a cigar. A Middle-European by birth, he had been trained in his chosen subject at the British Archaeological

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School in Athens and had led what could be called an un-patroned existence until (meeting her a good many years ago in Cairo) Miss Cacherton had taken him under her financial wing as organizer of her several digs, and eventually as curator of the antiquities that formed her *Collectanea*.

In person, Dr. Llados was a parchment-skinned, elderly man who, although expertly proficient in the field of archeology, was more interested in the acquisition of the rare, the unique, rather than in pure research. He would, for example, have given his still personal and excellent eyeteeth for an archeological object that had been thought impossible ever to find, but whose at-one-time existence was an historical fact. This trait explains, in a measure, his interruption.

"Fingerprints," he said, in a voice that still held a European flavor, "are somewhat of a hobby of mine. To a man whose metier is discovery they offer a challenge. Do you not think so, Mr. Laffkin?"

"A challenge? I don't quite follow you, Dr. Llados. I had always thought that the science of fingerprints was most exact."

"Oh, but it is, and that is just what I mean."

"I am still confused."

"I refer to the challenge of discovering two identical sets—the 64-billionth odds of finding identical sets belonging to two separate individuals." He turned to Stuff with a smile that, because of its obscurity, verged on the Mona Lisa. "I am correct in my figures, Mr. Driscoll?"

"According to Gonzales, Doctor, quite correct."

"Ha! Consider those odds, Mr. Laffkin. *Billions*, not mere millions. Sixty-four of them. Greater than the census of innumerable generations, almost reaching back toward the origin of man."

Hillman's own smile was patient. "I can understand, Doctor, that such identical sets would indeed be a collector's item, but how does it touch on our search right now?"

"It doesn't. Simply that your discussion with Mr. Driscoll triggered my hobby, my desire, my *idée fixé*, to chance upon an object that lies, presumably, in the realm of the impossible."

Hillman returned his attention to Stuff. "Will this processing take long, Mr. Driscoll?"

"I think not—because of the scar."

"Scar?"

"There's a small scar on the ball of his right thumb, and the line of the scar is broken by three microscopic gaps. Our Medical Examiner says it's an old one, and any peculiarity such as that on a print is of great help in hurrying the job."

"Tell me," Hillman said thoughtfully, "if publicity and fingerprints fail in identification, if no relative or friend comes forward, what avenues would be open to us then?"

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"Well, there are private inquiry agencies that specialize in missing persons. You could cover the world if you don't care how long the search takes, or how much it costs. You're serious about this?"

"Determined is a better word, Mr. Driscoll. I owe that stranger my life. Somewhere he must have loved ones. I want them, through establishing his identity, found. I want to be of any service to them that I can. If routine channels fail, I think it may be useful to post a reward of, say, ten thousand dollars for evidence establishing the man's identity. More than ten thousand, if you wish—whatever amount you say."

Six days passed without results. Many claims of recognition came in, but all proved, on investigation, false.

The Festival of the Arts closed, after a fine success in the sum of money raised for the children's hospital and clinic. Miss Cacherton and Dr. Llados, with the antiquities of the *Collectanea Cacherton* again aboard, sailed off on the *Eastern Star* for the Panama Canal and Southern California.

Hillman Laffkin had postponed his flight to Lisbon (his appearance before the convocation in Geneva was not scheduled before the end of the month) in order to have his brother's body placed in the Laffkin tomb in Woodlawn Cemetery. Hillman had then returned to Halcyon, again as a guest of Monsignor Lavigny, where he had followed the progress of the identity-search through constant contact with Stuff Driscoll.

The body of the stranger remained waiting, by Hillman's instructions, in a private chapel of The Halcyon Funeral Home. It waited for a name.

Even the huge reward—increased to $25,000—had failed to bring provable results. No avenue had been left unturned, and Hillman finally decided to have the stranger's body flown north by chartered plane and also placed in the family tomb—to rest there until the search, which in no sense had been called off, might solve the mystery and a final interment could be arranged in whatever place the stranger had called home.

Hillman did not accompany the stranger's coffin north, but he had directed the Agrarian Trust to take care of the entombment at the New York end.

Fate, again, might have been responsible—for the chartered plane carrying the coffin north crash-landed in flames on a moderate sea. The pilot escaped and was picked up by a freighter, in a state of shock and unable to relate what had happened. The plane, the coffin, and the body of the stranger sank irrevocably beneath the sea.

And two months later the mystery was solved . . .

Or was it?

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At ten o'clock on the night of January 15th, Stuff Driscoll received an urgent call from Monsignor Lavigny asking him to come to the prelate's home. He was to please bring with him a technical kit and one of the photostatic copies of the dead stranger's fingerprints.

When ushered into the library, Stuff found the prelate a strangely shaken man, with his skin drained to an unnatural pallor and his kind dark eyes filled with the look that blanks the vision only as the result of shock.

"A letter and this package were here when I came home from dining at Father Ainsworth's in Pompano," the prelate said without any preliminaries. "I want you to examine some fingerprints and compare them with those of the dead stranger. I shall, I almost dare say nothing until you have done so."

So strong was the atmosphere of tension under which the prelate labored that its effect was transferred to Stuff as he accepted an object which Monsignor Lavigny removed from the cardboard container in which it had traveled through the mails. Under the strong light of a gooseneck lamp on the library table, using a magnifying glass of considerable power, he studied the imprints of a thumb and three fingertips of a right hand, and then compared them with those of the stranger on the photostatic copy.

A quarter of an hour later Stuff placed the magnifying glass on the table and said, "The prints are identical. There can be no question about their having been left by the stranger. The scar alone should be enough to prove it, apart from other identical points. There's one odd thing though: these are contact prints and they were pressed into the cup, or bowl, or whatever this is, while the clay was still unglazed. The glazing covered and preserved them. When did he handle this? Was he a potter? Who was he?"

Monsignor Lavigny, automatically and still under the deadly calm of shock, opened a letter the contents of which covered several pages. "After I read you an excerpt from this," he said, "you must judge the answers for yourself. It's from Miss Cacherton, from Santa Barbara in California."

Monsignor Lavigny, in a voice oddly impersonal, as though he purposely did not wish to influence his listener in any way, read the excerpt: ". . . so you can imagine Dr. Llados' almost delirious surprise when he saw the scar with its three infinitesimal gaps. He insisted that I send it to you for verification by that dear Mr. Driscoll. It was only by chance that Dr. Llados noticed the prints while we were packing the artifacts after the Santa Barbara Arts Exhibition. He was instantly struck by the fantastic possibility that the 64-billionth chance could have come to pass—that the prints on this pottery bowl might be identical with those of the stranger who

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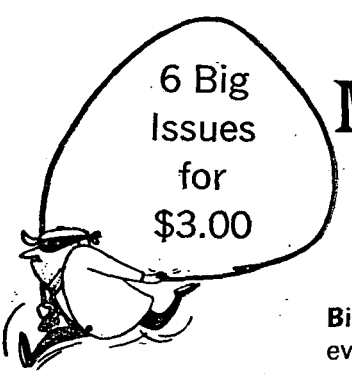
was shot, that two sets of identical prints of two *separate people* could exist! I underline 'separate people' because the bowl was one of our finds last spring when we did our dig in Israel on the shores of Galilee, and Dr. Llados, whose authority in such matters is unquestioned, says the prints were pressed on the bowl while it was still unglazed—something in the nature of 2000 years ago . . ."

Monsignor Lavigny dropped the letter onto the table. His eyes held distance and his voice was the softness of wonder. "On the shores of Galilee," he said. "One summer many years ago I went to them and I recall the blue waters, the dust-covered hills and cliffs. I too, then, walked along those shores that had known the step of Jesus, and the sound of His voice, and that had witnessed the multitudes that followed Him wherever he went."

The prelate's hand touched the pottery bowl and then the photostat of the stranger's prints with a curious reverence. "You can not kill a man," he murmured, "who does not die."



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As Hercule Poirot of "the little gray cells" explained to the dead man's widow: "In such a case the Insurance Company always has to satisfy itself as to a few details." N'est-ce-pas?

HERCULE POIROT, INSURANCE INVESTIGATOR

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

I HAD BEEN CALLED AWAY FROM town for a few days, and on my return found Hercule Poirot in the act of strapping up his small valise.

"*A la bonne heure*, Hastings. I feared you would not have returned in time to accompany me."

"You are called away on a case, then?"

"Yes, though I am bound to admit that on the face of it the affair does not seem promising. The Northern Union Insurance Company have asked me to investigate the death of a Mr. Maltravers who a few weeks ago insured his life with them for the sum of fifty thousand pounds."

"Yes?" I said, much interested.

"There was, of course, the usual suicide clause in the policy. In the event of his committing suicide within a year the premiums would be forfeited. Mr. Maltravers was duly examined by the Company's own doctor, and although he was a man slightly past the prime of life he was passed as being in quite sound health. However, on Wednesday last—the day before yesterday—the body of Mr. Maltravers was found on the grounds of his house in Essex, Marsdon Manor, and the cause of his death is described as some kind of internal hemorrhage.

"That in itself would be nothing remarkable, but sinister rumors as to Mr. Maltravers' financial position have been in the air of late and the Northern Union have ascertained beyond any possible doubt that the deceased gentleman stood on the verge of bankruptcy. Now that alters matters considerably.

"Maltravers had a beautiful young wife, and it is suggested that he got together all the ready money he could for the purpose of paying the premiums on a life insurance policy for his wife's benefit, and then committed suicide. Such a thing is not uncommon. In any case, my friend Alfred Wright, who is a director of the Northern Union, has asked me to investigate the facts

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of the case, but, as I told him, I am not very hopeful of success.

"If the cause of the death had been heart failure, I should have been more sanguine. Heart failure may aways be translated as the inability of the local G. P. to discover what his patient really did die of; but a hemorrhage seems fairly definite. Still, we can but make some inquiries. Five minutes to pack your bag, Hastings, and we will take a taxi to Liverpool Street."

About an hour later we alighted from a Great Eastern train at the little station of Marsdon Leigh. Inquiries at the station yielded the information that Marsdon Manor was about a mile distant. Poirot decided to walk, and we started along the main street.

"What is our plan of campaign?" I asked.

"First I will call on the doctor. I have ascertained that there is only one doctor in Marsdon Leigh—Dr. Ralph Bernard. Ah, here we are at his house."

The house in question was a kind of superior cottage, standing back a little from the road. A brass plate on the gate bore the doctor's name. We walked up the path and rang the bell.

We proved to be fortunate in our call. It was the doctor's consulting hour, and for the moment there were no patients waiting for him. Dr. Bernard was an elderly man, high-shouldered and stooping, with a pleasant vagueness of manner.

Poirot introduced himself and explained the purpose of our visit, adding that Insurance Companies were bound to investigate fully in a case of this kind.

"Of course, of course," said Dr. Bernard absently. "I suppose, as he was such a rich man, his life was insured for a big sum?"

"You considered him a rich man, Doctor?"

The doctor looked rather surprised.

"Was he not? He kept two cars, you know, and Marsdon Manor is a pretty big place to keep up, although I believe he bought it very cheap."

"I understand that he had had considerable losses of late," said Poirot, watching the doctor narrowly.

The latter, however, merely shook his head sadly.

"Is that so? Indeed. It is fortunate for his wife, then, that there is this life insurance. A very beautiful and charming young creature, but terribly unstrung by this sad catastrophe. A mass of nerves, poor thing. I have tried to spare her all I can, but of course the shock was bound to be considerable."

"You have been attending Mr Maltravers recently?"

"My dear sir, I never attended him."

"What?"

"I understand Mr. Maltravers was a Christian Scientist—or something of that kind."

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"But you examined the body?"

"Certainly. I was fetched by one of the gardeners."

"And the cause of death was clear?"

"Absolutely. There was blood on the lips, but most of the bleeding must have been internal."

"Was he still lying where he had been found?"

"Yes, the body had not been touched. He was lying on the edge of a small plantation. He had evidently been out shooting rooks—a small rook rifle lay beside him. The hemorrhage must have occurred quite suddenly. Gastric ulcer, without a doubt."

"No question of his having been shot, eh?"

"My dear sir!"

"I demand pardon," said Poirot humbly. "But, if my memory is not at fault, in the case of a recent murder, the doctor first gave a verdict of heart failure—altering it when the local constable pointed out that there was a bullet wound through the head!"

"You will not find any bullet wounds on the body of Mr. Maltravers," said Dr. Bernard dryly. "Now, gentlemen, if there is nothing further—"

We took the hint.

"Good morning, and many thanks to you, Doctor, for so kindly answering our questions. By the way, you saw no need for an autopsy?"

"Certainly not." The doctor became quite apoplectic. "The cause of death was clear, and in my profession we see no need to distress unduly the relatives of a dead patient."

And, turning, the doctor slammed the door sharply in our faces.

"And what do you think of Dr. Bernard, Hastings?" inquired Poirot, as we proceeded on our way to the Manor.

"Rather an old ass."

"Exactly. Your judgments of character are always profound, my friend."

I glanced at him uneasily, but he seemed perfectly serious. A twinkle, however, came into his eye, and he added slyly, "That is to say, when there is no question of a beautiful woman!"

On our arrival at the Manor-house the door was opened to us by a middle-aged parlormaid. Poirot handed her his card, and a letter from the Insurance Company for Mrs. Maltravers. She showed us into a small morning-room, and retired to tell her mistress.

About ten minutes elapsed, and then the door opened, and a slender figure in widow's weeds stood on the threshold.

"Monsieur Poirot?" she faltered.

"Madame!" Poirot sprang gallantly to his feet and hastened toward her. "I cannot tell you how I regret to derange you in this way. But what will you? *Les affaires*—they know no mercy."

Mrs. Maltravers permitted him to lead her to a chair. Her eyes were

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red with weeping, but the temporary disfigurement could not conceal her extraordinary beauty. She was about twenty-seven or -eight, and very fair, with large blue eyes and a pretty pouting mouth.

"It is something about my husband's insurance, is it? But must I be bothered *now*—so soon?"

"Courage, my dear madame. Courage! You see, your late husband insured his life for rather a large sum, and in such a case the Insurance Company always has to satisfy itself as to a few details. They have empowered me to act for them. You can rest assured that I will do all in my power to render the matter not too unpleasant for you. Will you recount to me briefly the sad events of Wednesday?"

"I was changing for tea when my maid came up—one of the gardeners had just run to the house. He had found—"

Her voice trailed away. Poirot pressed her hand sympathetically.

"I comprehend. Enough! You had seen your husband earlier in the afternoon?"

"Not since lunch. I had walked down to the village for some stamps, and I believe he was out pottering round the grounds."

"Shooting rooks, eh?"

"Yes, he usually took his little rook rifle with him, and I heard one or two shots in the distance."

"Where is this little rook rifle now?"

"In the hall, I think."

She led the way out of the room, found and handed the little weapon to Poirot, who examined it cursorily.

"Two shots fired, I see," he observed, as he handed it back. "And now, madame, if I might see—"

He paused delicately.

"The servant shall take you," she murmured, averting her head.

The parlormaid, summoned, led Poirot upstairs. I remained with the lovely and unfortunate woman. It was hard to know whether to speak or remain silent. I essayed one or two general reflections to which she responded mechanically, and in a very few minutes Poirot rejoined us.

"I thank you for all your courtesy, madame. I do not think you need be troubled any further with this matter. By the way, do you know anything of your husband's financial position?"

She shook her head. "Nothing whatever. I am very stupid about business things."

"I see. Then you can give us no clue as to why he suddenly decided to insure his life? He had not done so previously, I understand."

"Well, we had only been married a little over a year. But as to why he insured his life, it was because he had absolutely made up his mind that he would not live long. He had a strong premonition of his own death. I gather that he had had one hemorrhage already, and that he knew that another one would prove fatal. I tried to dispel these gloomy

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fears of his, but without avail. Alas, he was only too right!"

Tears in her eyes, she bade us a dignified farewell. Poirot made a characteristic gesture as we walked down the drive together.

"*Eh bien*, that is that! Back to London, my friend, there appears to be no mouse in this mouse-hole. And yet—"

"Yet what?"

"A slight discrepancy, that is all. You noticed it? You did not? Still, life is full of discrepancies, and assuredly the man cannot have taken his own life—there is no poison that would fill his mouth with blood. No, no, I must resign myself to the fact that all here is clear and aboveboard—but who is this?"

A tall young man was striding up the drive toward us. He passed us without making any sign, but I noted that he was not ill-looking, with a lean, deeply bronzed face that spoke of life in a tropic clime. A gardener who was sweeping up leaves had paused for a minute in his task, and Poirot ran quickly up to him.

"Tell me, I pray you, who is that gentleman? Do you know him?"

"I don't remember his name, sir, though I did hear it. He was staying down here last week for a night. Tuesday, it was."

"Quick, *mon ami*, let us follow him."

We hastened up the drive after the retreating figure. A glimpse of a black-robed figured on the terrace at the side of the house caused our quarry to swerve, and we after him, so that we were witnesses to the meeting.

Mrs. Maltravers almost staggered where she stood, and her face blanched noticeably.

"You," she gasped. "I thought you were at sea—on your way to East Africa?"

"I got some news from my lawyers that detained me," explained the young man. "My old uncle in Scotland died unexpectedly and left me some money. Under the circumstances I thought it better to cancel my passage. Then I saw this bad news in the paper and I came down to see if there was anything I could do. You'll want someone to look after things for you a bit perhaps."

At that moment they became aware of our presence. Poirot stepped forward, and with many apologies explained that he had left his stick in the hall. Rather reluctantly, it seemed to me, Mrs. Maltravers made the necessary introduction.

"Monsieur Poirot, Captain Black."

A few minutes' chat ensued, in the course of which Poirot elicited the fact that Captain Black was putting up at the Anchor Inn. The missing stick not having been discovered (which was not surprising), Poirot uttered more apologies and we withdrew.

We returned to the village and

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Poirot made a beeline for the Anchor Inn.

"Here we establish ourselves until our friend the Captain returns," he explained. "You notice that I emphasized the point that we were returning to London by the first train? Possibly you thought I meant it. But no—you observed Mrs. Maltravers' face when she caught sight of this young Black? She was clearly taken aback, and he—*eh bien*, he was very devoted, did you not think so? And he was here on Tuesday night—the day before Mr. Maltravers died."

In about half an hour we saw our quarry approaching the inn. Poirot went out and accosted him and presently brought him up to the room we had engaged.

"I have been telling Captain Black of the mission which brings us here," he explained. "You can understand, *monsieur le capitaine*, that I am anxious to arrive at Mr. Maltravers' state of mind immediately before his death, and that at the same time I do not wish to distress Mrs. Maltravers unduly by asking her painful questions. Now, you were here just before the occurrence, and can give us equally valuable information."

"I'll do anything I can to help you, I'm sure," replied the young soldier, "but I'm afraid I didn't notice anything out of the ordinary. You see, although Maltravers was an old friend of my family, I didn't know him very well myself."

"You came down—when?"

"Tuesday afternoon. I went up to town early Wednesday morning, as my boat sailed from Tilbury about twelve o'clock. But some news I got made me alter my plans, as I dare say you heard me explain to Mrs. Maltravers."

"Exactly. Now what was the talk about at dinner on Tuesday night?"

"Oh, I don't know—the usual odd topics. Maltravers asked after my people, and then Mrs. Maltravers asked a lot of questions about East Africa, and I told them one or two yarns. That's about all."

Poirot was silent for a moment, then he said gently, "With your permission I should like to try a little experiment. You have told us all that your conscious self knows. I want now to question your subconscious self."

"Psychoanalysis, what?" said Black, with visible interest.

"Oh, no," said Poirot reassuringly. "You see, it is like this: I give you a word, you answer with another, and so on. Any word, the first one you think of. Shall we begin?"

"All right," said Black.

"Note down the words, please, Hastings," said Poirot. Then he took from his pocket his big turnip-faced watch and laid it on the table beside him. "We will commence. Day."

There was a moment's pause, and then Black replied, "*Night.*"

As Poirot proceeded, his answers came quicker.

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"Name," said Poirot.
"*Place.*"
"Bernard."
"*Shaw.*"
"Tuesday."
"*Dinner.*"
"Journey."
"*Ship.*"
"Country."
"*Uganda.*"
"Story."
"*Lions.*"
"Rook rifle."
"*Farm.*"
"Shot."
"*Suicide.*"
"Elephant."
"*Tusks.*"
"Money."
"*Lawyers.*"

"Thank you, Captain Black. Perhaps you could spare me a few minutes in about half an hour's time?"

"Certainly." The young soldier looked at him curiously and wiped his brow as he got up.

"And now, Hastings," said Poirot, smiling at me as the door closed behind him. "You see it all, do you not?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"Does that list of words tell you nothing?"

I scrutinized it, but was forced to shake my head.

"I will assist you. To begin with, Black answered well within the normal time limit, with no pauses, so we can take it that he himself has no guilty knowledge to conceal. 'Day' to 'Night' and 'Place' to 'Name' are normal associations. I began the investigation with 'Bernard' which might have suggested the local doctor had Black come across him at all. Evidently he had not. After our recent conversation, he gave 'Dinner' to my 'Tuesday,' but 'Journey' and 'Country' were answered by 'Ship' and 'Uganda,' showing clearly that it was his journey abroad that was important to him and not the one which brought him down here.

"'Story' recalls to him one of the 'Lion' stories he told at dinner. I proceed to 'Rook rifle' and he answered with the totally unexpected word 'Farm.' When I say 'Shot,' he answers at once 'Suicide.' The association seems clear. A man he knows committed suicide with a rook rifle on a farm somewhere.

"Remember, too, that his mind is still on the stories he told at dinner, and I think you will agree that I shall not be far from the truth if I recall Captain Black and ask him to repeat the particular suicide story which he told at the dinner table on Tuesday evening."

Black was straightforward enough about it.

"Yes, I did tell them that story now that I come to think of it. Chap shot himself on a farm out there. Did it with a rook rifle through the roof of the mouth, bullet lodged in the brain. Doctors were no end puzzled over it—there was nothing to show except a little blood on the lips. But what—"

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"What has it got to do with Mr. Maltravers? You did not know, I see, that he was found with a rook rifle by his side."

"You mean my story suggested to him—oh, but that is awful!"

"Do not distress yourself—it would have been one way or another. Well, I must get on the telephone to London."

Poirot had a lengthy conversation over the wire, and came back thoughtful. He went off by himself in the afternoon, and it was not till seven o'clock that he announced that he could put it off no longer, but must break the news to the young widow.

My sympathy had already gone out to her unreservedly. To be left penniless, and with the knowledge that her husband had killed himself to assure her future was a hard burden for any woman to bear. I cherished a secret hope, however, that young Black might prove capable of consoling her after her first grief had passed. He evidently admired her enormously.

Our interview with the lady was painful. She refused vehemently to believe the facts that Poirot advanced, and when she was at last convinced she broke down into bitter weeping. An examination of the body turned our suspicions into certainty. Poirot was very sorry for the poor lady, but, after all, he was employed by the Insurance Company, and what could he do?

As he was preparing to leave he said gently to Mrs. Maltravers, "Madame, you of all people should know that there are no dead!"

"What do you mean?" she faltered, her eyes growing wide.

"Have you never taken part in any spiritualistic séances? You are mediumistic, you know."

"I have been told so. But you do not believe in Spiritualism, surely?"

"Madame, I have seen some strange things. You know they say in the village that this house is haunted?"

She nodded, and at that moment the parlormaid announced that dinner was ready.

"Won't you just stay and have something to eat?"

We accepted gratefully, and I felt that our presence could not help but distract her from her grief.

We had just finished our soup, when there was a scream outside the door, and the sound of breaking crockery. We jumped up. The parlormaid appeared, her hand to her heart.

"It was a man—standing in the passage."

Poirot rushed out, returning quickly.

"There is no one there."

"Isn't there, sir?" said the parlormaid weakly. "Oh, it did give me a start!"

"But why?"

"I thought—I thought it was the master—it looked like 'im."

I saw Mrs. Maltravers give a start, and my mind flew to the old

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superstition that a suicide cannot rest. She thought of it too, I am sure, for a minute later she caught Poirot's arm with a scream.

"Didn't you hear that? Those three taps on the window? That's how *he* always used to tap when he passed round the house."

"The ivy," I said. "It was the ivy against the pane."

But a sort of terror was gaining on us all. The parlormaid was obviously unstrung, and when the meal was over Mrs. Maltravers begged Poirot not to go at once. She was clearly terrified to be left alone.

We sat in the little morning-room. The wind was getting up, and moaning round the house in an eerie fashion. Twice the door of the room came unlatched and the door slowly opened, and each time she clung to me with a terrified gasp.

"Ah, but this door, it is bewitched!" cried Poirot angrily at last. He got up and shut it once more, then turned the key in the lock. "I shall lock it, so!"

"Don't do that," she gasped, "if it should come open now—"

And even as she spoke the impossible happened.

The locked door slowly swung open.

I could not see into the passage from where I sat, but she and Poirot were facing it. She gave one long shriek as she turned to him.

"You saw him—there in the passage?" she cried.

He was staring at her with a puzzled face, then shook his head.

"Madame, I saw nothing. You are not well—you are unstrung—"

"I am perfectly well, I—Oh, God!"

Suddenly, without any warning, the lights quivered and went out.

Out of the darkness came three loud raps.

I could hear Mrs. Maltravers moaning.

And then—I saw!

The man I had seen on the bed upstairs stood there facing us, gleaming with a faint ghostly light. There was blood on his lips, and he held his right hand out, pointing. Suddenly a brilliant light seemed to proceed from it. It passed over Poirot and me, and fell on Mrs. Maltravers. I saw her white terrified face, and then something else.

"My God, Poirot!" I cried. "Look at her hand, her right hand. It's all red!"

Her own eyes fell on it, and she collapsed in a heap on the floor.

"Blood," she cried hysterically. "Yes, it's blood. I killed him. I did it. He was showing me, and then I put my hand on the trigger and pressed. Save me from him—save me! He's come back!"

Her voice died away.

"Lights," said Poirot briskly.

The lights went on as by magic.

"That's it," he continued. "You heard, Hastings? And you, Everett? Oh, by the way, this is Mr. Everett, rather a fine member of the theatrical profession. I phoned to him

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this afternoon. His make-up is good, isn't it? Quite like the dead man, and with a pocket torch and the necessary phosphorescence he made the proper impression.

"I shouldn't touch her right hand if I were you, Hastings. Red paint marks so. When the lights went out I clasped her hand, you see. By the way, we mustn't miss our train. Inspector Japp is outside the window. A bad night—but he has been able to while away the time by tapping on the window every now and then."

"You see," continued Poirot, as we walked briskly through the wind and rain, "there was a little discrepancy. The doctor seemed to think the deceased was a Christian Scientist, and who could have given him that impression but Mrs. Maltravers? But to us she represented him as being in a grave state of apprehension about his own health. Again, why was she so taken aback by the reappearance of young Black?

"Well, there it was. There were the two possibilities. Did Black's story suggest an ingenious method of committing suicide to Mr. Maltravers? Or did his other listener, the wife, see an equally ingenious method of committing murder? I inclined to the latter view. To shoot himself in the way indicated, he would probably have had to pull the trigger with his toe—or at least, so I imagine. Now if Maltravers had been found with one boot off, we should almost certainly have heard of it from someone. An odd detail like that would have been remembered.

"No, as I say, I inclined to the view that it was a case of murder, not suicide, but I realized that I had not a shadow of proof in support of my theory. Hence the elaborate little comedy you saw played tonight."

"Even now I don't quite see all the details of the crime," I said.

"Let us start from the beginning. Here is a shrewd and scheming woman who, knowing of her husband's financial *débâcle* and tired of the elderly mate she has only married for his money, induces him to insure his life for a large sum, and then seeks for the means to accomplish her purpose. An accident gives her that—the young soldier's strange story.

"The next afternoon when *monsieur le capitaine*, as she thinks, is on the high seas, she and her husband are strolling round the grounds. 'What a curious story that was last night!' she observes. 'Could a man shoot himself in such a way? Do show me if it is possible!' The poor fool—he shows her. He places the end of the rifle in his mouth. She stoops down, and puts her finger on the trigger, laughing up at him. 'And now, sir,' she says saucily, 'supposing I pull the trigger?'

"And then—and then, Hastings—she pulls it!"

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There was no doubt that wealthy old Rufus Coker was being slowly and systematically poisoned; and there was no doubt that the crime was being committed by one of the five members of his family; and there was no doubt as to the motive. But that still left three of the classic problems: method, opportunity, identity . . .

HOW? WHEN? WHO?

by FLETCHER FLORA

IN THE FIRST PLACE, THIS DR. Wade Loos went to see Detective-Lieutenant Jesse Risen. In the second place, Detective-Lieutenant Jesse Risen came to see me. In the third place, naturally, we caught the poisoner. My name, by the way, is Roscoe Fay.

It was a cold overcast afternoon in November, shortly before Thanksgiving, and I had a small fire on the hearth for cheer, supported by central heating for comfort. Lieutenant Risen came into my study, tossing his deplorable hat and topcoat into a chair by the door, and dropped heavily into another chair which, anticipating him, I had pulled up before the fire. It was apparent that he was in an ugly frame of mind, resulting from a severe case of frustration, and I offered him some bourbon and water as an alleviative, which he accepted.

I had, of course, anticipated his mood as well as his person. Risen sneers at me as an amateur criminologist in fair weather, but every time the weather turns foul, figuratively speaking, he comes running to consult me. He comes, in brief, to pick my brains. I may as well, I think, be candid about it.

"Now," I said, when he had swallowed some of his bourbon and water, "what's the problem this time?"

He scowled at his glass. "Who says there's a problem?"

"Oh, come off it, Risen. Let's not delay the accomplishment of your mission. The only time you come to see me is when you do have a problem. You have one now, and I confess that I'm eager to hear about it."

"All right, all right. So I have a problem. Do you happen to know a Dr. Wade Loos?"

"I don't believe I've had the pleasure."

"Well, I know him, and it's no pleasure. The damned man has made a perfect nuisance of himself."

"Is that so? In what way?"

"He's the attending physician of a family named Coker, and he's

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convinced that someone is slowly poisoning old Rufus Coker, the head of the family."

"I must say I'm intrigued. I've heard of old Rufus, of course. An extremely wealthy man. He must be seventy now, at least. What evidence does Dr. Loos have that the old man is being poisoned?"

"That's the hell of it. He doesn't have any genuine evidence at all. Old Rufus, he says, is basically sound physically, not a thing wrong with him, and yet he is chronically ill and keeps failing with every day that passes. He's slowly dying, no question about it, and the doctor is thoroughly convinced, after making every effort to find a natural cause, that he's being poisoned."

"By someone in the house?"

"Yes. Certainly. No one else would have the opportunity."

"Except, perhaps, Dr. Loos."

"I've thought of that, but it won't wash. No one else in the family has expressed any suspicions. If the doctor were poisoning the old man, why would he deliberately call the attention of the police to it?"

"You're perfectly right, Risen. I was just testing to see if you had made that simple and essential elimination."

"Oh, I'm not so dull as you seem to think. I can at least see the obvious."

"Can you? Well, go on with your story, and we'll see if you can really see."

"Thank *you*. To get on with it, then, Dr. Loos suggested that the old man leave the house—get away from the family long enough, at least, to see if his condition improves. But the old man was merely enraged. He considers it absolutely incredible that any member of his family would wish to kill him. He even refused to submit to any tests that might reveal poison, and he berated the doctor for trying to disguise his own incompetence in failing to diagnose a natural ailment of some kind."

"Perhaps you had better identify the members of the household."

"Right. I'm coming to it. There are, to begin with, the daughter of old Rufus, and her husband. Caroline, her name is. She is, I'd guess, between thirty-five and forty. The husband is a bit younger—between thirty and thirty-five. His name is Warren Townsend, and he's a doctor too."

"Shades of Swope!"

"Swope? What's that supposed to mean?"

"Surely you've heard of the famous Swope case? It happened out in Kansas City soon after the turn of the century. In Independence, to be exact. Old Colonel Swope was a tremendously wealthy man. He lived in a Victorian mansion with several members of his family, including a daughter with a husband who was a doctor. An epidemic of slow poisoning began to kill off the family one by one, the Colonel

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included. There is public park in Kansas City today that bears his name. He donated the land, as I recall. It offers, among other things, quite a nice little zoo and one of those open air theaters in which musical comedies are presented during the summer season."

"That's very interesting, I'm sure, but who the devil was the poisoner?"

"Didn't I mention that? It was the son-in-law. The doctor. He was also the family physician. I wonder why Dr. Townsend isn't?"

"I don't believe it's considered good practice nowadays for a doctor to attend the members of his own family. Nevertheless, if there is any poisoning going on, he is certainly in the best position to do it. I'm keeping him in mind."

"Good. In the meanwhile, please tell me about the others."

"There is a sister. About sixty. A spinster. There is a grandson, the only child of another daughter, who is dead. Name of Jack Riley. A worthless fellow, I gather, but not without charm. There is, finally, a grandniece who is called Fanny. Last name Burnett. A lovely girl, always cheerful and vivacious. She's the only one, according to the doctor and Mrs. Weed, who ever shows any real affection for the old man."

"Mrs. Weed?"

"The housekeeper. Besides her, there are a cook, a maid, and a yard man. Mrs. Weed has been with old Rufus for many years. She has developed a kind of possessive feeling about him, and is apparently fiercely protective of what she considers his interests. Dr. Loos has made an ally of her in this business. She watches over the old man like a mother hawk and personally checks everything he eats and drinks."

"And still he continues in suspiciously failing health?"

"He does."

"That rather puts the good Mrs. Weed on a spot, doesn't it?"

"It does."

"The doctor wouldn't be the first to make a mistake in an ally."

"He wouldn't."

"Lieutenant, I am thoroughly captivated by your little drama. The cast of characters offers fascinating possibilities. Tell me, what are the provisions of the old man's will? I suppose, since a considerable fortune is involved, that avarice is a possible motive."

"It is, and it applies to all of them. There's nothing devious or secretive about old Rufus. All five are generously provided for, and they all know it. After his death none of them will need to worry about money, I should say, for as long as he or she lives."

"Well, I don't think we need to pursue that any further at the moment. Someone, apparently, is simply in a hurry to collect. What I would like to know now is what method or technique is suspected.

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In what way is the poison being introduced into the old man's system? Surely, if the doctor is right in his conviction, it must be something quite clever to be sustained so effectively in spite of all vigilance."

The Lieutenant sat staring into the small blaze, rolling his empty glass between his palms. I relieved him of the glass and filled it.

"In the beginning and for some time afterward," he said, "Dr. Loos was convinced that the old man was taking the poison orally. That's when he came to me for help. With his assistance, and that of Mrs. Weed, we sampled and analyzed, I'll swear, everything the old man took into his mouth—food, drink, mouth wash, medicine, even the solution he puts his dentures in. But we found nothing unusual—not the slightest trace of any poison."

"What kind of poison, by the way, does the doctor suspect?"

"The symptoms point to arsenic, but he contends, and I agree with him, that it should be a simple matter to identify the poison and the poisoner once we determine how it is being given."

"I also agree with that. In this case, as you have presented it, motive is obviously secondary to method."

"That brings me to Dr. Loos's current conviction. Failing to find the slightest evidence of oral ingestion, he is now convinced that the poison is being absorbed."

"So? Regular external applications absorbed by the skin?"

"Something like that."

"Have you also thoroughly investigated and analyzed pertinent items suggested by this theory?"

"Oh, of course. Right down to the old man's shaving lather and lotion. Even the blade of the old straight-edge razor he uses. He is confined to his bed now, and his physical contacts are easily kept under strict observation."

"Do the members of the household visit him in his bedroom?"

"Yes. He's a great family man, as I said—he won't listen to a word against any of them. However, Mrs. Weed usually manages to be present. A devil of a lot depends on the integrity of this woman, I know, but Dr. Loos has complete confidence in her, and I have a feeling his confidence is justified."

Risen sighed and drank from his glass, then leaned back in his chair with the definite indication that he had finished a wearisome account. I waited quietly to see if he would take it up again, but he did not.

"Is that all?" I said.

"That's all."

"I must say that you have brought me a rare puzzle, Risen."

"Is that all you have to say?" He gave me a sardonic sidewise glance. "You know all the characters and you have all the facts. Now let's have the solution. Tell me who is poisoning old Coker, and how."

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I had been waiting for the challenge, and I'll not deny there was an element of malice in my reply.

"As to the solution," I said, "I am not prepared to claim that much. I have, however, formed a working hypothesis, based strictly on your account, which I think you should at least put to the test."

"The devil you have! What is it?"

"As one must in mathematics, in order to proceed at all, I've made certain assumptions. I assume that Dr. Loos is a competent physician and that his evaluation of the situation is therefore basically correct. I assume that you are a competent policeman and reporter, and have given me a completely accurate report. I do *not*, however, assume that Dr. Loos's absorption theory is necessarily valid. In my opinion, you have not exhausted the possibilities of oral ingestion."

"I'd like to know what possibility we've overlooked."

"So you shall. I suggest that Rufus Coker is swallowing minute doses of white arsenic. The doses would have to be minute, for two-tenths of one gram of white arsenic can be fatal. Such a minute dose could be carried into the mouth by a swallow of food or liquid, by any one of innumerable small and ordinary actions—provided the minute dose *were already on the lips.*"

"What in God's name are you trying to say?"

"Let us clarify the matter by employing the Socratic method. Who, by your account, is the one person who shows affection for the old man? How, between the sexes, is affection traditionally demonstrated? What part of the anatomy, on the distaff side, is usually coated with a kind of perfumed and colored salve that could act both as a protective shield for the wearer and an adherent which could hold a minute dose of deadly powder until it could literally, with all the aspects of innocent affection, be rubbed off onto the corresponding part of someone else?

"If I were you, Lieutenant, I would interrupt this little demonstration the next time it occurs. In the words of the song so popular in my youth, *A little kiss each morning, a little kiss each night . . .*"

We sat for a while in silence. Then Risen deliberately set his empty glass on the edge of the hearth and slowly stood up.

"Oh!" he said. "Oh, my God!"

He walked over to the door, and taking up his hat and coat he went out into the late gray afternoon.

I did not see him again until about forty-eight hours later when he returned to concede that I had been precisely right. He had two long scratches on his left cheek, but he wore them with pride as the marks of a triumphant encounter. It was the first time to his knowledge, he said, that anyone in his precarious trade had ever wiped poison from the lips of a pretty girl.

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Welcome back, Simon Templar, the Saint—the contemporary apotheosis of Raffles-and-Lupin, the modern Robin Hood, the brighter buccaneer, the happy highwayman, the chivalrous crook, the romantic rogue—in the adventure of the pink diamond known as the Star of Mandalay . . . When once the Saint made up his mind to bring off a coup, it was impossible to argue with him—even if it was one of his maddest impulses . . .

THE SAINT TAKES ON A DARE

by LESLIE CHARTERIS

IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT SIMON Templar was a philanderer; but the criticism was not entirely just. A pretty face, or the turn of a slim ankle, appealed to him no more—and not a bit less—than they do to the next man. Perhaps he was more honest about it.

It is true that sometimes, in a particularly buccaneering mood, as he swung down a broad highway leading to infinite adventure, he would sing one of his own inimitable songs against the pompous dreariness of civilization as he saw it, with a chorus:

But if red blood runs thin with years,
By God! if I must die,
I'll kiss red lips and drink red wine
And let the rest go by,
My son,
And let the rest go by!

But there was a gesture in that, to be taken with or without salt as the audience pleased; and a fat lot the Saint cared. He was moderate in nothing that he said or did. That insurgent vitality which made him an outlaw first and last and in everything rebelled perhaps too fiercely against all moderation; and if at the same time it made him, to those who knew him best, the one glamorous and romantic figure of his day, that was the judgment which he himself would have asked for.

These chronicles are concerned mainly with episodes in which he provided himself with the bare necessities of life by cunning and strategy rather than by daring; but even in those times there were occasions when his career hung on the thread of a lightning decision. That happened in the affair of Mrs. Dempster-Craven's much-advertised pink diamond; and if the Saint philandered then, he would have told you that he had no regrets.

"The idea that such a woman should have a jewel that keeps me awake at nights," he complained.

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"I've seen her twice, and she is a Hag."

This was at dinner one night. Peter Quentin was there; and so was Patricia Holm, who, when all was said and done, was the lady who held the Saint's reckless heart and knew best how to understand all his misdeeds. The subject of the "Star of Mandalay" had cropped up casually in the course of conversation; and it was worth mentioning that neither of Simon Templar's guests bothered to raise any philosophical argument against his somewhat heterodox doctrine against the rights of Hags. But it was left for Peter Quentin to put his foot in it.

Peter read behind the wistfulness of the Saint's words, and said, "Don't be an idiot, Simon. You don't need the money, and you couldn't pinch the Star of Mandalay. The woman's got a private detective following her around wherever she goes—"

"Couldn't I pinch it, Peter?" said the Saint very softly.

Patricia saw the light in his eyes, and clutched Peter's wrist.

"You ass!" she gasped. "Now you've done it. He'd be fool enough to try—"

"Why 'try'?" asked the Saint, looking round mildly. "That sounds very much like an aspersion on my genius, which I shall naturally have to—"

"I didn't mean it like that," protested the girl frantically. "I mean that after all, when we don't need the money— You said you were thinking of running over to Paris for a week—"

"We can go via Amsterdam and sell the Star of Mandalay *en route*," said the Saint calmly. "You lie in your teeth, my sweetheart. You meant that the Star of Mandalay was too much of a problem for me and I'd only get in a mess if I tried for it. Well, as a matter of fact, I've been thinking of having a dart at it for some time."

Peter Quentin drank deeply of the Chambertin to steady his nerves.

"You haven't been thinking anything of the sort," he said. "I withdraw everything I said. You were just taking on a dare."

Simon ordered himself a second slice of melon, and leaned back with his most seraphic and exasperating smile.

"Have I," he inquired blandly, "ever told you my celebrated story about a bobtailed ptarmigan named Alphonse, who lived in sin with a couple of duckbilled platypi in the tundras of Siberia? Alphonse, who suffered from asthma and was a believer in Christian Science . . ."

He completed his narrative at great length, refusing to be interrupted; and they knew that the die was cast. When once Simon Templar had made up his mind it was impossible to argue with him. If he didn't proceed blandly to talk you down with one of his most fatuous and irrelevant anecdotes, he would listen politely to everything you

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had to say, agree with you thoroughly, and carry on exactly as he had announced his intentions from the beginning; which wasn't helpful.

And he had obviously made up his mind, on one of his mad impulses, that the Star of Mandalay was due for a change of ownership. It was not a very large stone, but it was reputed to be flawless; and it was valued at £10,000. Simon reckoned that it would be worth £5000 to him in Van Roeper's little shop in Amsterdam, and £5000 was a sum of money that he could find a home for at any time.

But he said nothing about that to Mrs. Dempster-Craven when he saw her for the third time and spoke to her for the first. He was extremely polite and apologetic. He had good reason to be, for the rakish Hirondel which he was driving had collided with Mrs. Dempster-Craven's Rolls Royce in Hyde Park, and the glossy symmetry of the Rolls Royce's real elevation had been considerably impaired.

"I'm terribly sorry," he said. "Your chauffeur pulled up rather suddenly, and my hand-brake cable broke when I tried to stop."

His hand-brake cable had certainly divided itself in the middle, and the frayed ends had been produced for the chauffeur's inspection; but no one was to know that Simon had filed it through before he started out.

"That is not my fault," said Mrs. Dempster-Craven coldly. She was going to pay a call on the wife of a minor baronet, and she was pardonably annoyed at the damage to her impressive car. "Bagshawe, will you please find me a taxi."

"The car'll take you there all right, ma'am," said the chauffeur incautiously.

Mrs. Dempster-Craven froze him through her lorgnettes.

"How," she required to know, "can I possibly call on Lady Wiltham in a car that looks as if I had picked it up at a second-hand sale? Kindly call me a taxi immediately, and don't argue."

"Yes, ma'am," said the abashed chauffeur, and departed on his errand.

"I really don't know how to apologize," said the Saint humbly.

"Then don't try," said Mrs. Dempster-Craven discouragingly.

The inevitable small crowd had collected, and a policeman was advancing ponderously toward it from the distance. Mrs. Dempster-Craven liked to be stared at as she crossed the pavement to Drury Lane Theatre on a first night, but not when she was sitting in a battered car in Hyde Park. But the Saint was not so self-conscious.

"I'm afraid I can't offer you a lift at the moment; but if my other car would be of any use to you for the reception tonight—"

"What reception?" asked Mrs. Dempster-Craven haughtily, having overcome the temptation to retort that she had three other Rolls

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Royces no less magnificent than the one she was sitting in.

"Prince Marco d'Ombria's," answered the Saint easily. "I heard you say that you were going to call on Lady Wiltham, and I had an idea that I'd heard Marco mention her name. I thought perhaps—"

"I am not going to the reception," said Mrs. Dempster-Craven; but it was noticeable that her tone was not quite so freezing. "I have a previous engagement to dine with Lord and Lady Bredon."

Simon chalked up the point without batting an eyelid. He had not engineered that encounter without making inquiries about his victim, and it had not taken him long to learn that Mrs. Dempster-Craven's one ambition was to win for herself and her late husband's millions an acknowledged position among the Very Best People.

That carelessly dropped reference to a Prince, even an Italian Prince, by his first name, had gone over like a truck load of honey. And it was a notable fact that if Mrs. Dempster-Craven had pursued her own inquiries into the reference, she would have found that the name of Simon Templar was not only recognized but hailed effusively; for there had once been a spot of bother involving a full million pounds belonging to the Bank of Italy which had made the Saint for ever *persona grata* at the Legation.

The chauffeur returned with a taxi, and Mrs. Dempster-Craven's fifteen stone of flesh were assisted ceremoniously out of the Rolls. Having had a brief interval to consider pros and cons, she deigned to thank the Saint for his share in the operation with a smile that disclosed a superb set of expensive teeth.

"I hope your car isn't seriously damaged," she remarked graciously; and the Saint smiled in his most elegant manner.

"It doesn't matter a bit. I was just buzzing down to Hurlingham for a spot of tennis, but I can easily take a taxi." He took out his wallet and handed her a card. "As soon as you know what the damage 'll cost to put right, I do hope you'll send me the bill."

"I shouldn't dream of doing such a thing," said Mrs. Dempster-Craven. "The whole thing was undoubtedly Bagshawe's fault."

With which startling *voite-face*, and another display of her expensive denture, she ascended regally into the cab; and Simon Templar went triumphantly back to Patricia.

"It went off perfectly, Pat! You could see the whole line sizzling down her throat till she choked on the rod. The damage to the Hirondel will cost about fifteen quid to put right, but we'll charge that up to expenses. And the rest of it's only a matter of time."

The time was even shorter than he had expected; for Mrs. Dempster-Craven was not prepared to wait any longer than was necessary to see her social ambitions fulfilled, and the

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highest peak she had attained at that date was a week-end at the house of a younger son of a second viscount.

Three days later Simon's postbag included a scented mauve envelope, and he knew before he opened it that it was the one he had been waiting for.

118, *Berkeley Square,*
Mayfair, W.1.

My dear Mr. Templar,

I'm sure you must have thought me rather abrupt after our accident in Hyde Park on Tuesday, but these little upsets seem so much worse at the time than they really are. Do try and forgive my rudeness.

I am having a little party here on Tuesday next. Lord and Lady Palfrey are coming, and the Hon. Celia Mallard, and lots of other people whom I expect you'll know. I'd take it as a great favor if you could manage to look in, any time after 9:30, just to let me know you weren't offended.

I do hope you got to Hurlingham all right.

Yours sincerely,
Gertrude Dempster-Craven

"Who said my technique ever failed me?" Simon demanded of Peter Quentin at lunchtime that day.

"I didn't," said Peter, "as I've told you all along. Thank God you won't be going to prison on Thursday, anyway—if it's only a little party she's invited you to I don't suppose you'll even see the Star of Mandalay."

Simon grinned.

"Little party be blowed," he said. "Gertrude has never thrown a little party in her life. When she talks about a 'little' party she means there'll only be two orchestras and not more than a hundred couples. And if she doesn't put on the Star of Mandalay for Lady Palfrey's benefit I am a bobtailed ptarmigan and my name is Alphonse."

Nevertheless, when he suggested that Peter Quentin should come with him there was not much argument.

"How can you get me in?" Peter demurred. "I wasn't invited, and I don't know any princes."

"You've got an uncle who's a lord or something, haven't you?"

"I've got an uncle who's the Bishop of Johannesburg; but what does Mrs. Dempster-Craven care about South African bishops?"

"Call him Lord Johannesburg," said the Saint. "She won't look him up in Debrett while you're there. I'll say we were dining together and I couldn't shake you off."

At that point it all looked almost tediously straightforward, a commonplace exploit with nothing but the size of the plum to make it memorable. And when Simon arrived in Berkeley Square on the date of his invitation it seemed easier still; for Mrs. Dempster-Craven, as he had expected, was proudly sporting the Star of Man-

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dalay on her swelling bosom, set in the center of a pattern of square-cut sapphires in a platinum pendant that looked more like an illuminated sky-sign than anything else.

True, there was a large-footed man in badly fitting dress clothes who trailed her around like a devoted dachshund; but private detectives of any grade the Saint felt competent to deal with. Professionals likewise, given a fair warning—although he was anticipating no professional surveillance that night.

But he had not been in the house twenty minutes before he found himself confronting a dark slender girl with merry brown eyes whose face appeared before him like the Nemesis of one of his most innocent flirtations—and even then he did not guess what Fate had in store for him.

At his side he heard the voice of Mrs. Dempster-Craven cooing like a contralto dove, "This is Miss Rosamund Armitage—a cousin of the Duke of Trayall." And then, as she saw their eyes fixed on each other, "But have you met before?"

"Yes—we have met," said the Saint, recovering himself easily. "Wasn't it that day when you were just off to Ostend?"

"I think so," said the girl gravely.

A plaintive baronet in search of an introduction accosted Mrs. Dempster-Craven from the other side, and Simon took the girl in his arms as the second orchestra muted its saxophones for a waltz.

"This is a very happy reunion, Kate," he murmured. "I must congratulate you."

"Why?" she asked suspiciously.

"When we last met—in that famous little argument about the Kellman necklace—you weren't so closely related to the Duke of Trayall."

They made a circuit of the floor—she danced perfectly, as he would have expected—and then she said bluntly, "What are you doing here, Saint?"

"Treading the light fantastic—drinking free champagne—and watching little monkeys scrambling up the social ladder," he answered airily. "And you?"

"I'm here for exactly the same reason as you are—my old-age pension."

"I can't imagine you getting old, Kate."

"Let's sit out somewhere," she said suddenly.

They left the ballroom and went in search of a secluded corner of the conservatory, where armchairs and sheltering palm trees provided discreet alcoves for romantic couples. Simon noticed that the girl was quite sure of her way around, and said so.

"Of course I've been here before," she said. "I expect you have, too."

"On the contrary—this is my first visit. I never take two bites at a cherry."

"Not even a ten thousand pound one?"

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"Not even that."

She produced a packet of cigarettes from her bag and offered him one. Simon smiled, and shook his head.

"There are funny things about your cigarettes that don't make me laugh out loud, Kate," he said cheerfully. "Have one of mine instead."

"Look here," she said. "Let's put our cards on the table. You're after that pendant, and so am I. Everything on our side is planned out, and you've just told me this is your first visit. You can't possibly get in front of us this time. You took the Kellman necklace away under our noses, but you couldn't do it again. Why not retire gracefully?"

He gazed at her thoughtfully for a few seconds; and she touched his hand.

"Won't you do that—and save trouble?"

"You know, Kate," said the Saint, "you're a lovely child. Would you mind very much if I kissed you?"

"I could make it worth a hundred pounds to you—for nothing—if you gave us a clear field."

Simon wrinkled his nose.

"Are there forty-nine of you?" he drawled. "It seems a very small share to me."

"I might be able to make it two hundred. They wouldn't agree to any more."

The Saint blew smoke rings toward the ceiling.

"If you could make it two thousand I don't think you'd be able to buy me off, darling. Being bought off is so dull. So what's the alternative? Am I slugged with another sandbag and locked up in the pantry?"

Suddenly he found that she was gripping his arm, looking straight into his face.

"I'm not thinking about your health, Saint," she said quietly. "I want that pendant. I want it more than I'd expect you to believe. I've never asked any other man a favor in my life. I know that in our racket men don't do women favors—without getting paid for it. But you're supposed to be different, aren't you?"

"This is a new act, Kate," murmured the Saint interestedly. "Do go on—I want to hear what the climax is."

"Do you think this is an act?"

"I don't want to be actually rude, darling, especially after all the dramatic fervor you put into it, but—"

"You've got every right to think so," she said; and he saw that the merriment was gone from her great brown eyes. "I should think the same way if I were in your place. I'll try to keep the dramatic fervor out of it. Can I tell you—that that pendant means the way out of the racket for me? I'm going straight after this." She was twisting her handkerchief, turning away from

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him now. "I'm going to get married —on the level. Funny, isn't it?"

He glanced at her doubtfully, with that mocking curve still lingering on his lips. For some reason he refrained from asking whether her other husbands had been informed of this plan; he knew nothing about her private life. But even with the best intentions a modern Robin Hood must get that way; and he did not know why he was silent.

And then, quite clearly, he heard the tread of leisurely feet on the other side of the clumps of imported vegetation behind which they were concealed. Instinctively they glanced at one another, listening, and heard a man's fat chuckle beyond the palms.

They heard a voice say, "I guess this new plan makes it a lot easier than the way we were going to work it."

Simon saw the girl half rising from the settee. In a flash he had flung one arm round her, pinning her down, and clapped his other hand over her mouth.

"Maybe it'll save a little trouble, anyway," said a second man. There came the scratch of a match, and then, "What are you doing about the girl?"

"I don't know . . . She's a pretty little thing, but she's getting too serious. I'll have to ditch her in Paris."

"She'll be sore."

"Well, she ought to know how to take the breaks. I had to keep her going to get us in here, but it ain't my fault if she wants to make it a permanency."

"What about her share?"

"Aw, I might send her a couple of hundred, just for conscience money. She ain't a bad kid. Too sentimental, that's all."

A short pause, and then the second man again: "Well, that's your business. It's just a quarter after eleven. Guess I better see Watkins and make sure he's ready to fix those lights."

The leisured feet receded again, and Simon released the girl slowly. He saw that she was as white as a sheet, and there were tears in her eyes. He lighted a cigarette methodically. It was a tough life for women —always had been. They had to know how to take the breaks.

"Did you hear?" she asked, and he looked at her again.

"I couldn't very well help it. I'm sorry, kid . . . That was your prospective husband, I suppose?"

She nodded.

There was nothing he could say. She stood up, and he walked beside her back to the ballroom. She left him there, with a smile that never trembled; and the Saint turned and found Peter Quentin beside him.

"Must you keep all the fun to yourself, old boy?" pleaded Peter forlornly. "I've been treading on the toes of the fattest dowager in the world. Who's your girl friend? She looks a stunner."

"She stunned me once," said the

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Saint reminiscently. "Or some pals of hers did. She's passing here as Rosamund Armitage; but the police know her best as Kate Allfield, and her nickname is The Mug."

Peter's eyes were following the girl yearningly across the room.

"There ought to be some hideous punishment for bestowing names like that," he declared; and the Saint grinned absent-mindedly.

"I know. In a storybook she'd be Isabelle de la Fontaine; but her parents weren't thinking about her career when they christened her. That's real life in our low profession —and so is the nickname."

"Does that mean there's competition in the field?"

"It means just that." Simon's gaze was sweeping systematically over the other guests; and at that moment he saw the men he was looking for. "You see that dark bird who looks as if he might be a gigolo? Face like a pretty boy, till you see it's just a mask cut in granite . . . . That's Philip Carney.

"And the big fellow beside him— just offering the Dempster-Craven a cigarette. That's George Runce. They're two of the slickest jewel thieves in the business. Mostly they work the Riviera—I don't think they've ever been in England before. Kate was talking in the plural all the time, and I wondered who she meant."

Peter's mouth shaped a silent whistle.

"What's going to happen?"

"I don't know definitely; but I should like to prophesy that at any moment the lights will go out—"

And as he spoke, with a promptness that seemed almost uncanny, the three enormous cut-glass chandeliers which illuminated the ballroom simultaneously flicked out as if a magic wand had conjured them out of existence; and the room was plunged into inky blackness.

The buzz of conversation rose louder, mingled with sporadic laughter. After trying valiantly to carry on for a couple of bars, the orchestra faded out irregularly, and the dancers shuffled to a standstill.

Over in one corner a facetious party started singing, "Where —was—Moses—when—the—lights —went—out?"

And then, rising above every other sound, came Mrs. Dempster-Craven's hysterical shriek:

"*Help!*"

There was a momentary silence, broken by a few uncertain titters. And Mrs. Dempster-Craven's voice rang wildly through the room again.

"My pendant! My pendant! Put on the lights!"

Then came the sharp vicious smash of a fist against flesh and bone, a coughing grunt, and the thud of a fall. Peter Quentin felt around him, but the Saint had gone. Peter started across the room, plunging blindly among the crowd that was heaving helplessly in the darkness.

Then one or two matches flared

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up, and the light grew as other matches and lighters were struck to augment the illumination. And just as suddenly as they had gone out, the great chandeliers lighted up again.

Peter Quentin looked at the scene from the front rank of the circle of guests. George Runce was lying on the floor, with blood trickling from a cut in his chin; and a couple of yards from him sat Simon Templar, holding his jaw tenderly.

Between them lay Mrs. Dempster-Craven's priceless pendant, with the chain broken; and while Peter looked she snatched it up with a sob, and he saw that the Star of Mandalay was missing from its center.

"My diamond!" she wailed. "It's gone!"

Her private detective came elbowing through from the back of the crowd, pushing Peter aside, and grabbed the Saint's shoulder.

"Come on, you!" he barked. "What happened?"

"There's your man," said the Saint, pointing to the unconscious figure beside him. "As soon as the lights went out, he grabbed the pendant—"

"That's a lie!"

Philip Carney had fallen on his knees beside Runce and was loosening the man's collar. He turned round and yapped the denial indignantly enough; but Peter saw that his face had gone pale.

"I was standing beside Mr. Runce." Carney pointed to the Saint. "That man snatched the pendant, and Mr. Runce tried to keep him from getting away."

"Why weren't you here, Watkins?" wailed Mrs. Dempster-Craven, shaking the detective wildly by the arm. "Why weren't you watching? I shall never see my diamond again—"

"I'm sorry, madam," said the detective. "I just left the room for one minute to find a glass of water. But I think we've got the man all right." He bent down and hauled the Saint to his feet. "We'd better search this fellow, and one of the footmen can go for the police while we're doing it."

Peter saw that the Saint's face had gone hard as polished teak.

In Simon's right hand was the Star of Mandalay, pressed against his jaw as he was holding it.

As soon as the lights had gone out he had guessed what was going to happen: he had crossed the floor like a cat, grasped it neatly as Runce tore it out of its setting, and sent the big man flying with one well-directed left. All that he had been prepared for; but there were wheels turning that he had never reckoned with.

He looked the detective in the eyes.

"The less you talk about the police the better," the Saint said quietly. "I was in the conservatory a few minutes ago, and I happened to hear Mr. Carney say, 'I'd better see Watkins and make sure he's

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ready to fix those lights.' I didn't think anything of it at the time, but this looks like an explanation."

There was an instant's deadly silence; and then Philip Carney laughed.

"That's one of the cleverest tricks I've ever heard of," he remarked. "But it's a bit libelous, isn't it?"

"Not very," said a girl's clear voice.

Again the murmur of talk was stifled as if a blanket had been dropped on it; and in the hush Kate Allfield came into the front of the crowd.

George Runce was rising on his elbows, and his jaw dropped as he heard her voice. She gave him one contemptuous glance, and faced Mrs. Dempster-Craven with head erect.

"It's perfectly true," she said. "I was with Mr. Templar in the conservatory, and I heard it as well."

Carney's face had gone gray.

"The girl's raving," he said, but his voice was a little shaky. "I haven't been in the conservatory this evening."

"Neither have I," said Runce, wiping the frozen incredulity from his features with an effort. "I'll tell you what it is—"

But he did not tell them what it was, for at that point a fresh authoritative voice interrupted the debate with a curt "Make way, please," and the crowd opened to let through the burly figure of a detective-sergeant in plain clothes.

Simon looked round and saw that the detective had posted a constable at the door as he came in. The detective scanned the faces of the group, and addressed Mrs. Dempster-Craven.

"What's the trouble, madam?"

"My pendant—"

She was helped out by a chorus of bystanders whose information, taken in the mass, was somewhat confusing. The detective sorted it out phlegmatically; and at the end he shrugged.

"Since these gentlemen are all accusing each other, I take it you don't wish to make any particular charges?"

"I cannot accuse my guests of being thieves," said Mrs. Dempster-Craven imperially. "I only want my diamond."

The detective nodded. He had spent twelve years in C Division, and had learned that Berkeley Square is a region where even policemen have to be tactful.

"In that case," he said, "I think it would help us if all the gentlemen agreed to be searched."

The Saint straightened up.

It had been a good evening; and he had no regrets. The game was worth playing for its own sake, to him; the prizes came welcomely, but they weren't everything. And no one knew better than he that you couldn't win all the time.

There were chances that couldn't be reckoned with in advance; and the duplicity of Mr. Watkins was

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one of those. But for that, he would have played his hand faultlessly, outbluffed and outmaneuvered the Carney-Runce combination in a fair field, and made as clean a job of it as anything else he had ever done.

But that single unexpected factor had turned the scale just enough to bring the bluff to a showdown, as unexpected factors always would. And yet Peter Quentin saw that the Saint was smiling.

"I think that's a good idea," said the Saint.

Betweeen Philip Carney and George Runce flashed one blank glance; but their mouths remained closed.

"Perhaps there's another room we could go to," said the detective, almost genially; and Mrs. Dempster-Craven inclined her head like a queen dismissing a distasteful odor.

"Watkins will show you to the library."

Simon turned on his heel and led the way toward the door, with Mr. Watkins still gripping his arm; but as his path brought him level with Kate he stopped and smiled at her.

"I think you're a swell kid," he said.

His voice sounded a trifle strange. And then, before two hundred shocked and startled eyes, including those of Lord and Lady Bredon, the Honourable Celia Mallard, three baronets, and the aspiring Mrs. Dempster-Craven herself, he placed his hands gently on her shoulders and kissed her outrageously on the mouth; and in the silence of appalled aristocracy which followed that performance made his stately exit.

"How the devil did you get away with it?" asked Peter Quentin weakly, as they drove away in a taxi an hour later. "I was fairly sweating blood all the time you were being searched."

The Saint's face showed up in the dull glow as he drew at his cigarette.

"It was in my mouth," he said.

"But they made you open your mouth—"

"It was there when I kissed Kate, anyway," said the Saint, and sang to himself all the rest of the way home.

EDITORS' NOTE: *Now that you have read the stories by Leslie Charteris (about the Saint, a modern Robin Hood) and by Fletcher Flora (about Roscoe Fay, a modern armchair detective), you see why we decided to publish both stories, back to back, in the same issue. The two stories are completely different in every conceivable way—except one. The characters are different, the events, the settings, the tone, the types they represent in the*

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mystery genre—everything is different, except one thing: the basic plot concept is the same—in principle. But how vastly different are the Charteris and Flora variations (for one giddy moment we were tempted to say "as different as Fauna and Flora"). How vastly unlike the techniques, the plot developments, the final revelations. Ah, the ingenuity of the creative mind! Age cannot wither, nor custom stale its infinite variety . . .

For still another completely different variation, read Ellery Queen's "The Three Widows," published in the January 1952 issue of EQMM, in Q.B.I.: QUEEN'S BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION, *and reprinted most recently in* ELLERY QUEEN'S 1963 ANTHOLOGY.

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE HARDCOVERS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Chaber, M. E.	SIX WHO RAN	Holt, Rinehart & Winston	$3.50	8/20
Charteris, Leslie	VENDETTA FOR THE SAINT	Doubleday	3.95	8/21
Cleeve, Brian	DEATH OF A WICKED SERVANT	Random House	3.95	Aug.
Egan, Lesley	MY NAME IS DEATH	Harper & Row	3.95	8/12
Haggard, William	THE ANTAGONISTS	Ives Washburn	3.50	8/24
Langley, Lee	OSIRIS DIED IN AUTUMN	Doubleday	3.50	8/7
Monteilhet, Hubert	THE ROAD TO HELL	Simon & Schuster	3.50	8/14
Mortlock, Bill (not Wm.)	A PLANNED COINCIDENCE	Macmillan	3.95	Aug.
O'Malley, Patrick	THE AFFAIR OF JOHN DONNE	William Morrow (Mill)	3.50	8/13
Philips, Judson	THE LAUGHTER TRAP	Dodd, Mead	3.50	8/10
Procter, Maurice	TWO MEN IN TWENTY	Harper & Row	3.95	8/26
Queen, Ellery	ELLERY QUEEN'S DOUBLE DOZEN (anthology)	Random House	4.95	Aug.
Reagan, Thomas B.	BANK JOB	Torquil Press	3.50	8/10
Sloane, William	THE RIM OF MORNING	Dodd, Mead	5.00	8/10
Simenon, Georges	FIVE TIMES MAIGRET	Harcourt, Brace & World	5.95	8/26
Stewart, Mary	THIS ROUGH MAGIC	William Morrow (Mill)	4.95	8/10
van Gulik, Robert	THE EMPEROR'S PEARL	Chas. Scribner's	3.50	8/28
Wilkinson, Burke	NIGHT OF THE SHORT KNIVES	Chas. Scribner's	4.50	8/19

CURRENT MYSTERY AND SUSPENSE PAPERBACKS

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Dean, Amber	BULLET PROOF	Popular Library	50¢	8/4
Eberhart, Mignon G.	DEADLY IS THE DIAMOND	Popular Library	50¢	8/18
Marlowe, Dan J.	NEVER LIVE TWICE	Gold Medal (Original)	40¢	7/30
Piper, Evelyn	HANNO'S DOLL	Crest Books	40¢	8/11

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EQMM, 24th year

"Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine" is now bigger and better than ever—32 extra pages in every issue, at 50 cents per copy. These 32 added pages every month bring you the highest possible quality of mystery fiction—from stories of pure detection (amateur, armchair, and official) and probing studies of crime (psychological, psychiatric, and Robin Hoodish) to tours de force of suspense, surprise, and even the supernatural.

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Erle Stanley Gardner
Rex Stout (about **Nero Wolfe**)
Agatha Christie
Cornell Woolrich
William Irish
Hugh Pentecost
Patrick Quentin
Q. Patrick
Ed McBain
the **Gordons**
Julian Symons
Victor Canning
Kelley Roos
Philip Wylie
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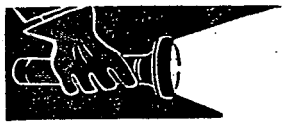

BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

The long-respected by-line of "Frances and Richard Lockridge" appears for the last time on QUEST OF THE BOGEYMAN and THE DEVIOUS ONES (Lippincott, $3.50 each), both admirably ingenious suspense thrillers (without the Norths or Captain Heimrich). Frances Lockridge was, as a versatile and impeccable craftsman of mystery-making, one of the most devious ones. You are invited to join me in grateful tribute to her memory—and in wishing Richard Lockridge all success with his forthcoming solo efforts.

★★★★ **THE ENGLISH WIFE, *by Charity Blackstock*** (Coward-McCann, $3.95)

Violence, treachery and murder in the Highland Clearances of 1815 serve as background for one of Miss Blackstock's powerful (and equally violent) love stories.

★★★ **THE HUNTING-GROUND, *by Francis Clifford*** (Coward-McCann, $3.95)

Caribbean island republic is setting for quiet tense pursuit story reminiscent of Geoffrey Household.

★★★ **TRAP FOR CINDERELLA, *by Sébastien Japrisot*** (Simon & Schuster, $3.50)

Winner of Grand Prix de la Littérature Policière, ably translated by Helen Weaver, is odd provocative tale of subtle ambivalences.

★★★ **A HANK OF HAIR, *by Charlotte Jay*** (Harper & Row, $3.50)

Brief, intense, morbid story of murder and obsession, for fanciers of Grand Guignol, Friedrich Duerrenmatt, or THE COLLECTOR.

★★★ **FUNERAL OF FIGARO, *by Ellis Peters*** (Morrow, $3.50)

Last year's Edgar-winner returns with murder in the opera house—a charming novel, rich in understanding of Mozart and his interpreters.

★★★ **THE GRAVE-MAKER'S HOUSE, *by Rubin Weber*** (Harper & Row, $3.50)

Short, strong and refreshing first novel of murder and the public conscience, with vivid Pennsylvania Dutch locale.

My own BEST DETECTIVE STORIES OF THE YEAR: 19TH ANNUAL COLLECTION (Dutton, $3.50) contains 17 stories from the magazine year 1963—five from EQMM and one by EQ. I hope you'll find it a varied and stimulating selection.

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ELLERY IN A COUNTRY CHURCHYARD

by RICHARD M. GORDON

It *shouldn't* be the butler,
And it *couldn't* be the vicar;
There are methods that are subtler
Than the cyanide in liquor.
And the poor distressful damsel
Who wails, "Had I but known . . ."
Be she fraulein, miss, or ma'mselle,
I can take or leave alone.
Save me from the author-lady
With her gentle, genteel crime;
This reader is afraid he
Just hasn't got the time
To explore the rector's garden
Searching for a telling clue,
So I beg the author's pardon,
But I don't mind telling you
That I like my action quicker.
Gad! It *couldn't* be the vicar!

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A near "first story"—actually, the author's second story; his first story was published last year by "Atlantic Monthly."

The author is 33 years old. In his student days, he tells us, he "wrote enough fiction to ruin a small library, but never had the courage to submit any of it for publication." At 20 he began to make a living ghost-writing political speeches (in Michigan) and in the years since he has "churned out a long-ton of publicity copy, press releases, theatrical blurbs, etc."

About the middle of last year Mr. Somerlott decided to take his life's savings and go to Mexico to write—for himself. Result: his "first story" to "Atlantic," his second story to EQMM . . .

"Fox in the Night" is a deceptively simple tale about a murder that occurs in a Mexican village whose culture hasn't changed in a hundred years—"a hundred? more like five hundred"—and about a detective who believes "it would be foolish to allow murder to interrupt siesta" . . .

FOX IN THE NIGHT

by ROBERT SOMERLOTT

SEVEN BLACK-VEILED WOMEN knelt in the darkened room. Flickering candles at the head and feet of the corpse projected grotesque shadows on the adobe walls and multiplied the seven into a legion of shapeless mourners who writhed and swayed to a ceaseless chant. "*Ave, Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum . . .*"

The corpse in its coffin rested on four wooden sawhorses. From a crack in the door to the patio a ray of sunlight struck the cold forehead of Don Diego Hernandez. The voice of the oldest woman rose in a keening wail, drowning out the cadence of *Aves* and the click of rosary beads.

The morticians had painted the old skinflint with vivid cosmetics. His thin lips bloomed like jacarandas. The dead man's folded hands grasped two lilies and for the first time in fifty years were not clutching for a peso. The craftsmen for the dead had performed their work with great imagination. Quickly, too. Only the morning before the corpse had been found in an ant-infested gutter. Considering this, Don Diego looked very good indeed.

In a small room across the sun-drenched patio Detective Sargento Vincente Lopez of Guadalajara sat at a rickety table. He silently cursed everything about this miserable, burro-haunted suburb. Thrusting out his strong lower jaw, he blew a

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mighty blast of air upward. His fierce black mustachios trembled like palms before a hurricane. "Caramba!"

The backroom of this little store was hotter than a tortilla griddle. The sergeant's massive brown hand toyed with a half-empty Coke bottle whose warmth tempted only the cloud of flies buzzing around it. Lopez longed for his comparatively cool office in the city. But even more he longed to deliver a powerful kick to the insolent backside of the young police inspector from Mexico City. This target was beautifully displayed. The young know-it-all was now bent over, his back to Lopez, wiping dust from his fancy Italian shoes. What a temptation!

This whelp had been passed off as "a graduate student observing police methods." It had not taken Lopez five seconds to spot him as some sort sort of spy sent out by the political meddlers in the Capital. The Whelp would doubtless write a report showing that the provincial police were fools, with a certain Sargento Vincente Lopez heading the list.

"It would seem at first glance that you have a problem here," the Whelp said. "But perhaps the solution is not far to seek." Still bent over, the Whelp brushed a fly from his greased hair.

The toe of Lopez' huge boot ached with longing. Twenty-eight years of police experience might count for very little if he bungled in the presence of this politically connected upstart. The Whelp would scribble a few sentences to his bureaucrat employers, and Lopez' incompetence would provide the political ammunition they were looking for. He must move carefully as a cat.

"With your permission," said Lopez, "I would like to hear the daughter's story once more." The Whelp acquiesced with weary impatience.

The girl Sofia entered, bringing fresh Cokes to replace the bottles on the table. She apologized for their warmth. Her father had not bought ice his last day, and the Coke cooler was now like an oven.

Sofia wore the funereal black that would shroud her for the next year. But the somber dress and jet mantilla only added to her wistful seventeen-year-old appeal. Her features were fine—almost purely Spanish—yet her skin was as warmly coffee-colored as Lopez' own.

The sergeant was a very happily married man with eleven children, but he spent a long moment in appreciation of the girl before he spoke. "Señorita, a thousand pardons. I must intrude on your grief once more and ask you to repeat your tragic story."

"It is all because of the evil refrigerator," she said, two great teardrops forming in her soft brown eyes. "Each night my father would take a few pesos from the till and save them to buy a great refrigerator made by the General Electric."

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The refrigerator would chill the Cokes and beer that were the best-selling items in Don Diego's little store. Although the home-built shelves were stocked with American soap flakes and cans of mackerel, the liquid refreshments were the real money makers—even outselling the rice and frijoles that stood in dusty kegs beside the door. The refrigerator would represent a major commercial triumph, since the store across the street would still rely on an icebox, as Don Diego himself had always had to do.

"And I understand that your honored father boasted of his intentions," Lopez said.

"Si. Señor Avila has owned the store across the street for many years. They were in bitter competition, God forgive them. Last week Señor Avila told the whole street that my father's scales were dishonest—that he cheated on the frijoles. Ah, the quarrel that followed! Que furioso! My father struck Señor Avila in the face with a mop, and said he would spit on his mother's grave. Señor Avila threw a pail of slops on my father and threatened to get his pistol. It was then my father shouted that very soon he would buy the great refrigerator. No one would get Cokes from Señor Avila any more, since ours would be colder. Then Juanito, the hunchback who sells ice cream from a cart, came between them. But my father turned on Juanito and screamed that the new refrigerator would also have a Deep Freezing Compartment. We would sell ice cream cheaper, and soon Juanito the hunchback would be out of business and starving. Ah, God forgive them all!".

The rest of Sofia's story was the same as before. Her father had saved over eight thousand pesos—a fantastic sum by the village standards, for in Mexico a refrigerator is a painfully expensive thing. For that money one could buy a small house of one's own, or live for more than a year on the fat of the village.

Don Diego kept the money in a safe, cemented in the tile floor under the bed which he, a widower, occupied alone. He had seen too much of his uncertain world to trust banks, checks, or credit. Only pesos under the bed were sure.

The Whelp suddenly leaned into their conversation. "You are prepared to swear, Señorita, that no one but yourself knew the exact evening when your father would go to Guadalajara with eight thousand pesos under his serape?"

"Jesus, Mary, and Joseph are my witnesses. No one else knew. It could have been next week—even next month. Do you think my father was fool enough to tell the whole street that on a certain night he would stand alone at the dark bus stop with all that money?"

"No!" The Whelp's voice rose dramatically. "But I think his daughter was fool enough to tell a certain young man who works in

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this store. A young man whose eyes long for her."

"I did not tell Carlos anything."

The Whelp spread his hands patronizingly. "Ah, Señorita, here is a young man, handsome as he is poor. All the street knows he wishes to marry you. But your father laughed at such an idea, and promised you to Señor Lima, the mechanic. And so, one night—"

The Whelp's small fist crashed on the table. Sofia cried out and flung herself upon Lopez, weeping.

"It is a lie, Sargento. A lie!"

After a moment Lopez gently freed himself from the girl's trembling arms. For all his strength and roughness, he had a father's tenderness. Under the bristling brows that made him resemble a caricature of Pancho Villa, his brown eyes were kindly. How many crying children had he comforted? He had lost count.

The Whelp stared across the patio. The door to the living quarters was now open and sunlight streamed in on the kneeling women, reflecting brightly from the clicking rosaries and the silver buckles on the coffin. Contempt for their ancient rite was written on the Whelp's face.

"Sergeant," he said. "An arrest is in order. If the young man Carlos and the girl are innocent, they can clear themselves later."

Lopez shook his dark head firmly. "We have much time, but no evidence, my friend."

"On the contrary, Sergeant, formidable evidence has escaped you. Early this morning, while you were doubtless busy at home, I myself investigated. True, Don Diego was found near the bus stop and this girl claims he was going to Guadalajara. True, the money is missing from the safe. But Don Diego did not leave this house alive! Señora Victoria Diaz was sitting by her window. She saw Don Diego close his doors at seven. She swears he did not come out again."

"The Señora Victoria Diaz is cross-eyed. Perhaps she is mistaken," said Lopez.

"Two other witnesses say the same. There is only one door. Perhaps you suggest that Don Diego slipped between the iron bars of the rear window? No! His skull was crushed in this house—perhaps in this room—and his body carried to the bus stop when the street was asleep."

"No!" Sofia cried out. "That night I went to the promenade in the plaza. My father had told Carlos to stop work early. We walked home together at ten. I thought my father was asleep in his room, or had not yet returned from the city."

Lopez studied the tearful face of the girl a moment. "Gracias, Señorita. We will wait until tomorrow. You may return to your prayers."

Sofia dropped a quick curtsy to Lopez and left, ignoring the Whelp, who stood aside in ill-concealed anger. Lopez admired the smooth way she walked—straight-backed,

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like the Tarascan Indian women in the village where Lopez was born.

The two men then went across the street where Señor Avila's sun-parched store hummed with business and gossip. The beers they bought were tepid, for the village iceman was just then making delivery from his two-wheeled cart. The Whelp sulked in the coolest corner, having nudged Avila's flea-devoured dog out of the shade with the pointed toe of his shoe. Lopez tried to learn more about the lamented Don Diego.

Señor Avila was a sleepless-looking man. Like his starved dog, his bones nearly pierced his sagging skin. He would speak no evil of the dead, of course. He would only say that his former competitor had been a highly honorable man who was so tight-fisted he would snatch centavos from the hands of beggar children.

The man who had delivered ice to Don Diego seven days a week for five years was another who would speak no evil. But he quickly added that the deceased had always weighed every piece of ice on his own dubious scales. Further, on the only day in the past five years when delivery failed, Don Diego attempted to charge him for a quarter kilo of butter that melted. Apart from these small foibles, he had been a "wonderful person."

"A truly noble soul," agreed hefty Señor Lima, the successful mechanic who had been selected for Sofia. "I worked for him many times and usually he paid me. He would have been a fine father-in-law. Only last week I repaired the pump for him and he paid me half what I asked with no argument." Señor Lima tucked his belly into his trousers, and sighed in bereavement.

The two policemen returned to the street. Juanito, the hunchback, crouched near his ice cream wagon in the shadow of a tumble-down wall. Had he known the late Don Diego? The hunchback spat. Did he know of any bandits in the neighborhood? The hunchback raised a skeletal hand in a vile gesture.

"It was the Devil that killed him," he said. "I myself made the doll with garbage from his own store. I myself crushed the head with pliers."

The Whelp looked uncomfortable. "This is pointless, Sergeant. I'll meet you here tomorrow. If you cannot be roused to action, perhaps your superiors can be."

The Whelp scattered the ragged children who had swarmed over his sleek government car. He drove off with the village dog pack in barking pursuit, sending clouds of dust into windows on both sides of the narrow street.

Lopez climbed into his ancient Ford. To come the few miles to this village was to go back a hundred years in time. Between the adobe walls, from whose tops brown weeds sprouted, the soulful burros plodded over ancient cobblestones. A hundred years? More like five hundred.

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Back to a culture the Whelp would never understand, but which was part of Lopez' blood.

Just as he started the motor, Sofia and the boy Carlos emerged from the store. They walked slowly hand in hand, turning the corner toward the bus stop. Was there a chance they might lead him to a place where Don Diego's pesos were buried? It seemed too good to hope for—and too terrible to believe. The boy had such a look of gentleness, and the Señorita—ah, the Señorita!

Lopez followed the bus. Although he could not see its name on the front, he knew from the direction that it was going to the nearby town of Zapopan, a dusty place with no distinction except a huge cathedral housing a tiny statue of the Virgin. This miraculous statue, it was said, had once halted a raging flood. Generations later, she helped raise the declining waters of Lake Chapala, and performed countless other services for the public good. The Virgin had been made a full general in the army, and her extraordinary power was venerated and feared.

Sofia and Carlos dismounted from the bus, and still walking hand in hand went up the broad steps of the cathedral. Lopez gave a great sigh of relief and his mustachios trembled. This settled it. The innocent might well go to the Virgin to pray for deliverance from suspicion. But the guilty? Such audacity was beyond belief!

A short time later the boy and girl left the cathedral and walked toward the plaza. Lopez started his car. The Whelp's sneering face loomed up in his mind, ten times larger than life. The sergeant hesitated, then turned off the motor. Leaving his car, he went quickly into the church.

Fired with the determination of a matador, Lopez drove back to the village. He walked slowly past the murdered man's house and turned the corner, leaving the town's single street and moving toward the bus stop.

The barren fields began immediately behind Don Diego's store. Three hundred meters away was the highway and the bus stop. Here and there clumps of scrub brush and cactus broke the empty wasteland. One small adobe crouched not far from the rear of the store building, nearly concealed in a thicket. An ancient earth-colored woman sat in the doorway, her worn hands ceaselessly slapping tortilla dough.

Lopez doffed his hat and approached her gallantly. "Good day, Mother. I seek information about the honored Don Diego Hernandez."

"A good man, my son. We all mourn him."

"A noble person," Lopez agreed. "But, of course, there are evil tongues who say he had his faults."

She crossed herself. "What do the people of the village know? Not one has come here since the sickness car-

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ried off my sons and their children. And I, who know all, say nothing of Don Diego. For to spread scandal is to cut open a pillow. The feathers are quick to fly, but slow to gather."

"Mother," said Lopez, "I need truth. Not for myself, but for a young boy and girl. Tell me, and the saints will remember you."

Her hands paused in their endless rhythm. "God will forgive Don Diego," she said at last. "After all, he was a widower and men will be men. Even his own daughter did not know how he used to steal away secretly at night to visit the evil señoritas who live in Campo Seven. In life he paid for them in pesos. Now he pays in Purgatory."

"Tell me, Mother, why did not the whole street know?"

"He was a clever fox in the night. The first time I saw him come through the bars of his window, I thought it was the Devil himself. But the following week the moon was full, and I saw clearly."

"A thousand thanks, Mother."

"Go with God, my son."

Lopez strode to the rear window of Don Diego's house. Quickly he tested the iron bars, but they did not yield to his pulling. Then he twisted the last three bars on the right, and Don Diego's secret was revealed. They were not welded but cleverly threaded at the top and bottom to unscrew silently and free the widower for his nocturnal prowls. No small amount of care and mechanical skill had gone into their construction.

Lopez glanced at his watch. He started it running again by banging his wrist twice against the building, and then referred to the sun for the time. Nearly three o'clock! At home his wife was waiting dinner. After that the big bedroom would be cool for an hour's nap. He had much thinking to do, but it would be foolish to allow murder to interrupt siesta.

The next morning Lopez occupied the seat of honor behind the table in the backroom of the store. Actually, he was outranked by savage-looking old Captain Valles, his immediate superior, who had "just casually come by" with two uniformed policemen. The Whelp stood next to the captain, while Sofia and Carlos sat on crates opposite Lopez, who was just concluding a rather long speech.

"So we know the plan of the honored Don Diego. Trusting no one, he sent his clerk away an hour early. He locked the only door and turned out the lights. The street thought he had gone to bed. In truth, he left by the rear window to go to Guadalajara where the stores were open late. After his talk of a refrigerator, he was afraid of alerting some thief if he closed early and was seen going toward the highway. A sly fox—but too sly for the murderer who was already waiting near the bus stop."

Captain Valles said, "This seems

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very probable. I think it is correct."

"Admirable detection," agreed the Whelp smoothly. "Sergeant Lopez has come neatly back to where he was yesterday. But he has still not explained the important thing. Why this particular man on this particular night? *Someone knew!*" The Whelp's voice became threatening. "Who more likely than his daughter's special friend?"

Captain Valles looked sharply at Lopez, demanding an answer.

Lopez hesitated. The terrible question had come—the question to which he had no reply. He said, "In a little time I will reveal this, too. But I think we are all thirsty. By your leave, Señorita, may I bring Cokes from the store?"

Sofia, too weary to answer, nodded. Lopez went to the next room where the door to the street stood open to entice an unexpected breeze. Que terrible! What a situation! With one hand he fumbled with the bottles while with the other he pounded the back of his head to beat his brain to action. "Lady of Zapopan, tell me the answer."

Lopez turned away from the Coke box and glanced into the street where a familiar figure was passing by. Suddenly a clear message came to Lopez—perhaps from the warm bottles under his arm before they crashed to the floor. Leaping through the door, Lopez raced across the street.

"Ay!" he bellowed. His eyes blazed and his mustachios quivered with ferocity. "Ay!" he yelled and seized the man with his great hands.

"Ladron! Did you think you could escape me? Did you not know the money would be found in your miserable house? Did you not know the old Señora saw you in the shadows? Pig and child of pigs!"

The man crumpled in Lopez' grasp. "The money was mine!" he cried. "He cheated me penny by penny. I did not mean to kill him. I did not mean to kill!"

The shouts brought the people from the backroom and in a moment the whole street had gathered round. Lopez thrust the guilty man into the arms of the two policemen. "Take the pig to Guadalajara. The case is solved."

They dragged the murderer toward the waiting car. Before its door slammed, he gave one last wail. "My ice! My cart of ice. The sun will melt it!" But he need not have worried, for even then Señor Avila was carrying the cold blocks into his store to chill beer for the celebration that would surely follow.

For a second Lopez stood wondering how it had all happened. Then he drew himself up to full height and spoke. "It was clear to me from the beginning. Don Diego, rest his sweet soul, was a miser. Would he order ice when he knew he would have a refrigerator the next day? And when, for the first time in years, he does *not* order it—Caramba! A burro could see it."

Captain Valles shook Lopez' hand.

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"A remarkable job, Sargento. A remarkable job!" The Whelp mumbled congratulations, which Lopez accepted magnanimously. But Sofia stood to one side, her wide eyes fixed on some distant point. Expanding his chest to the maximum, Lopez approached her. She smiled very gently.

"Carlos and I asked Our Lady's help at Zapopan yesterday," she said. "Afterward, we sat in the plaza and saw you go into the church. Our Lady is quite wonderful to have found the murderer, is she not?"

Lopez' chest deflated a bit. He glanced around quickly, but no one had heard.

"Yes, Señorita," he whispered. "A remarkable job."

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Eight times John Smith successfully murdered his unsuspecting bride; but when he tried to make it Number Nine, John Smith learned that something new had been added . . . a wicked and witty story.

NINE-FINGER JACK

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

JOHN SMITH IS AN UNEXCITING name to possess, and there was of course no way for him to know until the end of his career that he would be forever famous among connoisseurs of murder as Nine-Finger Jack. But he did not mind the drabness of Smith; he felt that what was good enough for the great George Joseph Smith was good enough for him.

Not only did John Smith happily share his surname with George Joseph, he was proud to follow the celebrated G.J. in profession and even in method. For an attractive and plausible man of a certain age, there are few more satisfactory sources of income than frequent and systematic widowerhood; and of all the practitioners who have acted on this practical principle, none has improved on George Joseph Smith's sensible and unpatented Brides-in-the-Bath method.

John Smith's marriage to his ninth bride, Hester Pringle, took place on the morning of May the thirty-first. On the evening of May the thirty-first John Smith, having spent much of the afternoon pointing out to friends how much the wedding had excited Hester and how much he feared the effect on her notoriously weak heart, entered the bathroom and with the careless ease of the practiced professional, employed five of his fingers to seize Hester's ankles and jerk her legs out of the tub while with the other five fingers he gently pressed her face just below water level.

So far all had proceeded in the conventional manner of any other Smithian wedding night; but the ensuing departure from ritual was such as to upset even John Smith's professional bathside manner. The moment Hester's face and neck were submerged below water, she opened her gills.

In his amazement John released his grasp on both ends of his bride. Her legs descended into the water and her face rose above it. As she passed from the element of water to that of air, her gills closed and her mouth opened.

"I suppose," she observed, "that in the intimacy of a long marriage

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you would eventually have discovered in any case that I am a Venusian. It is perhaps as well that the knowledge came early, so that we may lay a solid basis for understanding."

"Do you mean," John asked, for he was a precise man, "that you are a native of the planet Venus?"

"I do," she said. "You would be astonished to know how many of us there are already among you."

"I am sufficiently astonished," said John, "to learn of one. Would you mind convincing me that I did indeed see what I thought I saw?"

Obligingly Hester lowered her head beneath the water. Her gills opened and her breath bubbled merrily.

"The nature of our planet," she explained when she emerged, "has bred as its dominant race our species of amphibian mammals, in all other respects superficially identical with *homo sapiens*. You will find it all but impossible to recognize any of us, save perhaps by noticing those who, to avoid accidental opening of the gills, refuse to swim. Such concealment will of course be unnecessary soon when we take over complete control of your planet."

"And what do you propose to do with the race that already controls it?"

"Kill most of them, I suppose," said Hester; "and might I trouble you for that towel?"

"That," pronounced John, with any handcraftsman's abhorrence of mass production, "is monstrous. I see my duty to my race: I must reveal all."

"I am afraid," Hester observed as she dried herself, "that you will not. In the first place, no one will believe you. In the second place, I shall then be forced to present to the authorities the complete dossier which I have gathered on the cumulatively interesting deaths of your first eight wives, together with my direct evidence as to your attempt this evening."

John Smith, being a reasonable man, pressed the point no further. "In view of this attempt," he said, "I imagine you would like either a divorce or an annulment."

"Indeed I should not," said Hester. "There is no better cover for my activities than marriage to a member of the native race. In fact, should you so much as mention divorce again, I shall be forced to return to the topic of that dossier. And now, if you will hand me that robe, I intend to do a little telephoning. Some of my better-placed colleagues will need to know my new name and address."

As John Smith heard her ask the long-distance operator for Washington, D. C., he realized with regretful resignation that he would be forced to depart from the methods of the immortal George Joseph.

Through the failure of the knife, John Smith learned that Venusian blood has extraordinary quick-clotting powers and Venusian organs

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possess an amazingly rapid system of self-regeneration.

The bullet taught him a further peculiarity of the blood: that it dissolves lead—in fact, thrives on lead.

His skill as a cook was quite sufficient to disguise any of the commoner poisons from human taste; but the Venusian palate not only detected but relished most of them. Hester was particularly taken with his tomato aspic *a l'arsénique* and insisted on his preparing it in quantity for a dinner of her friends, along with his *sole amandine* to which the prussic acid lent so distinctively intensified a flavor and aroma.

While the faintest murmur of divorce, even after a year of marriage, evoked from Hester a frowning murmur of "Dossier . . ." the attempts at murder seemed merely to amuse her; so that finally John Smith was driven to seek out Professor Gillingsworth at the State University, recognized as the ultimate authority (on this planet) on life on other planets.

The professor found the query of much theoretical interest. "From what we are able to hypothesize of the nature of Venusian organisms," he announced, "I can almost assure you of their destruction by the forced ingestion of the best Beluga caviar, in doses of no less than one-half pound per diem."

Three weeks of the suggested treatment found John Smith's bank account seriously depleted and his wife still in perfect health.

"That dear Gilly!" she laughed one evening. "It was so nice of him to tell you how to kill me; it's the first time I've had enough caviar since I came to earth. It's so dreadfully expensive."

"You mean," John demanded, "that Professor Gillingsworth is also . . ."

She nodded.

"And all that money!" John protested. "You do not realize, Hester, how unjust you are. You have deprived me of my income and I have no other source."

"Dossier," said Hester through a mouthful of caviar.

America's greatest physiologist took an interest in John Smith's problem. "I should advise," he said, "the use of crystallized carbon placed directly in contact with the sensitive gill area."

"In other words, a diamond necklace?" John Smith asked. He seized a water carafe, hurled its contents at the physiologist's neck and watched his gills open.

The next day John purchased a lapel flower through which water may be squirted—an article which he thenceforth found invaluable for purposes of identification.

The use of this flower proved to be a somewhat awkward method of starting a conversation and often led the conversation into unintended paths; but it did establish a certain clarity in relations.

It was after John had observed the opening of the gills of a leading

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criminal psychiatrist that he realized where he might find the people who could really help him.

From then on, whenever he could find time to be unobserved while Hester was engaged in her activities preparatory to world conquest, he visited insane asylums, announced that he was a free-lance feature writer, and asked if they had any inmates who believed that there were Venusians at large on Earth and planning to take it over.

In this manner he met many interesting and attractive people, all of whom wished him godspeed in his venture, but pointed out that they would hardly be where they were if all their own plans for killing Venusians had not miscarried as hopelessly as his.

From one of these friends, who had learned more than most because his Venusian wife had made the error of falling in love with him (an error which led to her eventual removal from human society), John Smith ascertained that Venusians may indeed be harmed and even killed by many substances on their own planet, but seemingly by nothing on ours—though his wife had once dropped a hint that one thing alone on earth could prove fatal to the Venusian system.

At last John Smith visited an asylum whose director announced that they had an inmate who thought he *was* a Venusian.

When the director had left them, a squirt of the lapel flower verified the claimant's identity.

"I am a member of the Conciliationist Party," he explained, "the only member who has ever reached this earth. We believe that Earthmen and Venusians can live at peace as all men should, and I shall be glad to help you destroy all members of the opposition party.

"There is one substance on this earth which is deadly poison to any Venusian. Since in preparing and serving the dish best suited to its administration you must be careful to wear gloves, you should begin your campaign by wearing gloves at all meals . . ."

This mannerism Hester seemed willing to tolerate for the security afforded her by her marriage and even more particularly for the delights of John's skilled preparation of such dishes as spaghetti *all'aglio ed all'arsenico* which is so rarely to be had in the average restaurant.

Two weeks later John finally prepared the indicated dish: oxtail according to the richly imaginative recipe of Simon Templar, with a dash of deadly nightshade added to the other herbs specified by The Saint. Hester had praised the recipe, devoured two helpings, expressed some wonder as to the possibility of gills in its creator, whom she had never met, and was just nibbling at the smallest bones when, as had been foretold, she dropped dead.

Intent on accomplishing his objective, John had forgotten the

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dossier, nor ever suspected that it was in the hands of a gilled lawyer who had instructions to pass it on in the event of Hester's death.

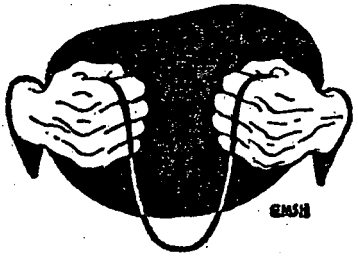
Even though that death was certified as natural, John rapidly found himself facing trial for murder, with eight other states vying for the privilege of the next opportunity should this trial fail to end in a conviction.

With no prospect in sight of a quiet resumption of his accustomed profession, John Smith bared his knowledge and acquired his immortal nickname. The result was a period of intense prosperity among manufacturers of squirting lapel flowers, bringing about the identification and exposure of the gilled masqueraders.

But inducing them, even by force, to ingest the one substance poisonous to them was more difficult. The problem of supply and demand was an acute one, in view of the large number of the Venusians and the small proportion of members of the human race willing to perform the sacrifice made by Nine-Finger Jack.

It was that great professional widower and amateur chef himself who solved the problem by proclaiming in his death cell his intention to bequeath his body to the eradication of Venusians, thereby pursuing after death the race which had ruined his career.

The noteworthy proportion of human beings who promptly followed his example in their wills has assured us of permanent protection against future invasions, since so small a quantity of the poison is necessary in each individual case; after all, one finger sufficed for Hester.



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a **LORD PETER WIMSEY** *novelet*

It all started for Lord Peter when the little man with the cowlick and the red hair told Lord Peter a harrowing story. Was it a fourth dimensional mystery? Or was it a modern tale of the Devil and Mr. Duckworthy? Whatever it was, Mr. Duckworthy's strange adventures—especially in his dreams—sent Lord Peter Wimsey, monocle in tight, a-checkin' and a-huntin' . . .

SOMETHING QUEER ABOUT MIRRORS

by DOROTHY L. SAYERS

THE LITTLE MAN WITH THE COWlick seemed so absorbed in the book that Lord Peter Wimsey had not the heart to claim his property; but drawing up the other armchair and placing his drink within easy reach, he did his best to entertain himself with the Dunlop Book, which graced, as usual, one of the tables in the lounge.

The little man read on, his elbows squared upon the arms of his chair, his ruffled red head bent anxiously over the text. He breathed heavily, and when he came to the turn of the page, he set the thick volume down on his knee and used both hands for his task. Not what is called "a great reader," Wimsey decided.

When he reached the end of the story, he turned laboriously back, and read one passage over again with attention. Then he laid the book, still open, on the table, and in so doing caught Wimsey's eye.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said in his rather thin Cockney voice "is this your book?"

"It doesn't matter at all," said Wimsey graciously, "I know it by heart. I only brought it along with me because it's handy for reading a few pages when you're stuck in a place like this for the night. You can always take it up and find something entertaining."

"This chap H. G. Wells," pursued the red-haired man, "he's what you'd call a very clever writer, isn't he? It's wonderful how he makes it all so real, and yet some of the things he says, you wouldn't hardly think they could be really possible. Take this story now; would you say, sir, a thing like that could actually happen to a person, as it might be you—or me?"

Wimsey twisted his head round to get a view of the page.

"*The Plattner Experiment*," he

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said. "That's the one about the schoolmaster who was blown into the fourth dimension and came back with his right and left sides reversed. Well, no, I don't suppose such a thing would really occur in real life—though of course it's very fascinating to play with the idea of a fourth dimension."

"Well—" He paused and looked up shyly at Wimsey. "I don't rightly understand about this fourth dimension. I didn't know there was such a place—but he makes it all very clear no doubt to them that know science. But this right-and-left business, now, I know that's a fact. By experience, if you'll believe me."

Wimsey extended his cigarette case. The little man made an instinctive motion toward it with his left hand and then seemed to check himself and stretched his right across.

"There, you see. I'm always left-handed when I don't think about it. Same as this Plattner in the story. I fight against it, but it doesn't seem any use. But I wouldn't mind that—it's a small thing and plenty of people are left-handed and think nothing of it. No. It's the dretful anxiety of not knowing what I mayn't be doing when I'm in this fourth dimension or whatever it is."

He sighed deeply. "I'm worried, that's what I am, worried to death."

"Suppose you tell me about it," said Wimsey.

"I don't like telling people about it, because they might think I had a slate loose. But it's fairly getting on my nerves. Every morning when I wake up I wonder what I've been doing in the night and whether it's the day of the month it ought to be. I can't get any peace till I see the morning paper, and even then I can't be sure . . .

"Well, I'll tell you, if you won't take it as a bore or a liberty. It all began—" He broke off and glanced nervously about the room. "There's nobody to see. If you wouldn't mind, sir, putting your hand just here a minute—"

He unbuttoned his rather regrettable double-breasted waistcoat, and laid a hand on the part of his anatomy usually considered to indicate the site of the heart.

"By all means," said Wimsey, doing as he was requested.

"Do you feel anything?"

"I don't think I do," said Wimsey. "What ought I to feel? A swelling or anything? If you mean your pulse, the wrist is a better place."

"Oh, you can feel it *there*, all right," said the little man. "Just try the other side of the chest, sir."

Wimsey obediently moved his hand across.

"I seem to detect a little flutter," he said after a pause.

"You do? Well, you wouldn't expect to find it that side and not the other, would you? Well, that's where it is. I've got my heart on the right side—I mean, on the *wrong*

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side. That's what I wanted you to feel for yourself."

"Did it get displaced in an illness?" asked Wimsey sympathetically.

"In a manner of speaking. But that's not all. My liver's got round the wrong side, too, and my organs. I've had a doctor see it, and he told me I was all reversed. I've got my appendix on my left side—that is, I had till they took it away. If we was private, now, I could show you the scar. It was a great surprise to the surgeon when they told him about me. He said afterwards it made it quite awkward for him—coming left-handed to the operation, as you might say."

"It's unusual, certainly," said Wimsey, "but I believe such cases do occur sometimes."

"Not the way it occurred to me. It happened in an air raid."

"In an air raid?" said Wimsey, aghast.

"Yes—and if that was all it had done to me I'd put up with it and be thankful. Eighteen I was then, and I'd just been called up. Previous to that I'd been working in the packing department at Crichton's—you've heard of them, I expect—Crichton's for Admirable Advertising, with offices in Holborn. My mother was living in Brixton, and I'd come up to town on leave from the training camp. I'd been seeing one or two of my old pals, and I thought I'd finish the evening by going to see a film at the Stoll.

"It was after supper—I had just time to get in to the last house, so I cut across from Leicester Square through Covent Garden Market. Well, I was getting along when wallop!—a bomb came down it seemed to me right under my feet, and everything went black for a bit."

"That was the raid that blew up Odham's, I suppose."

"Yes, it was January 28th, 1918. Well, as I say, everything went right out. Next thing as I knew, I was walking in some place in broad daylight, with green grass all round me, and trees, and water to the side of me, and knowing no more about how I got there than the man in the moon."

"Good Lord!" said Wimsey. "And was it the fourth dimension, do you think?"

"Well, no, it wasn't. It was Hyde Park, as I come to see when I had my wits about me. I was along the bank of the Serpentine and there was a seat with some women sitting on it, and children playing about."

"Had the explosion damaged you?"

"Nothing to see or feel, except that I had a big bruise on one hip and shoulder as if I'd been chucked up against something. I was fairly staggered. The air raid had gone right out of my mind, don't you see, and I couldn't imagine how I came there, and why I wasn't at Crichton's.

"I looked at my watch, but that had stopped. I was feeling hungry.

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I felt in my pocket and found some money there, but it wasn't as much as I should have had—not by a long way. But I felt I must have a bit of something, so I got out of the Park by the Marble Arch gate, and went into a Lyons. I ordered two poached on toast and a pot of tea, and while I was waiting I took up a paper that somebody had left on the seat.

"Well, that finished me. The last thing I remembered was starting off to see that film on the 28th—and here was the date on the paper—January 30th! I'd lost a whole day and two nights somewhere!"

"Shock," suggested Wimsey. The little man took the suggestion and put his own meaning on it.

"Shock? I should think it was. I was scared out of my life. The girl who brought my eggs must have thought I was barmy. I asked her what day of the week it was, and she said 'Friday.' There wasn't any mistake.

"Well, I don't want to make this bit too long, because that's not the end by a long chalk. I got my meal down somehow, and went to see a doctor. He asked me what I remembered doing last, and I told him about the film, and he asked whether I was out in the air raid. Well, then it came back to me, and I remembered the bomb falling, but nothing more.

"He said I'd had a nervous shock and lost my memory for a bit, that it often happened and I wasn't to worry. And then he said he'd look me over to see if I'd got hurt at all. So he started in with his stethoscope, and all of a sudden he said to me, 'Why, your heart is on the wrong side, my lad!'

"'It is?' said I. 'That's the first I've heard of it.'

"Well, he looked me over pretty thoroughly, and then he told me what I've told you—that I was all reversed inside—and he asked a lot of questions about my family. I told him I was an only child and my father was dead—killed by a motor-lorry, he was, when I was a kid of ten—and I lived with my mother in Brixton and all that. And he said I was an unusual case, but there was nothing to worry about. Bar being wrong side round I was sound as a bell, and he told me to go home and take things quietly for a day or two.

"Well, I did, and I felt all right, and I thought that was the end of it, though I'd overstayed my leave and had a bit of a job explaining myself to the R.T.O. It wasn't till several months afterwards the draft was called up, and I went along for my farewell leave. I was having a cup of coffee in the Mirror Hall at the Strand Corner House—you know it, down the steps?"

Wimsey nodded.

"All the big looking glasses all round. I happened to look into the one near me, and I saw a young lady smiling at me as if she knew me. That is, I saw her reflection, if you understand me. Well, I couldn't

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make it out, for I had never seen her before, and I didn't take any notice, thinking she'd mistook me for somebody else. Besides, though I wasn't so very old then, I thought I knew her sort, and my mother had always brought me up strict.

"I looked away and went on with my coffee, and all of a sudden a voice said quite close to me, 'Hullo, Ginger—aren't you going to say good evening?'

"I looked up and there she was. Pretty, too, if she hadn't been painted up so much.

" 'I'm afraid,' I said, rather stiff, 'you have the advantage of me, miss.'

" 'Oh, Ginger,' says she, 'Mr. Duckworthy, and after Wednesday night!' A kind of mocking way she had of speaking.

"I hadn't thought so much of her calling me Ginger, because that's what any girl would say to a fellow with my sort of hair, but when she got my name off so pat, I tell you it did give me a turn.

" 'You seem to think we're acquainted, miss,' said I.

" 'Well, I should rather say so, shouldn't you?' said she.

"There! I needn't go into it all. From what she said I found out she thought she'd met me one night and taken me home with her. And what frightened me most of all, she said it had happened on the night of the big air raid.

" 'It *was* you,' she said, staring into my face a little puzzled-like. 'Of course it was you. I knew you in a minute when I saw your face in the glass.'

"Of course, I couldn't say that it hadn't been. I knew no more of what I'd been and done that night than the babe unborn. But it upset me cruelly, because I was an innocent sort of lad in those days and hadn't ever gone with girls, and it seemed to me if I'd done a thing like that I ought to know about it. It seemed to me I'd been doing wrong and not getting full value for my money either.

"I made some excuse to get rid of her, and I wondered what else I'd been doing. She couldn't tell me farther than the morning of the 29th, and it worried me a bit wondering if I'd done any other queer things."

"It must have," said Wimsey, and put his finger on the bell. When the waiter arrived, he ordered drinks for two and disposed himself to listen to the rest of Mr. Duckworthy's adventures.

"I didn't think much about it, though," went on the little man. "We went abroad, and I saw my first corpse and dodged my first shell and had my first dose of the trenches, and I hadn't much time for what they call introspection.

"The next queer thing that happened was in the C.C.S. at Ypres. I'd got a blighty one near Caudry in September during the advance from Cambrai—half buried, I was, in a mine explosion and laid out un-

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conscious near twenty-four hours it must have been.

"When I came to, I was wandering about somewhere behind the lines with a nasty hole in my shoulder. Somebody had bandaged it up for me, but I hadn't any recollection of that. I walked a long way, not knowing where I was, till at last I fetched up in an aid post. They fixed me up and sent me down the line to a base hospital.

"I was pretty feverish, and the next thing I knew I was in bed with a nurse looking after me. The bloke in the next bed to mine was asleep. I got talking to a chap in the bed beyond him, and he told me where I was, when all of a sudden the other man woke up and says, 'My God,' he says, 'you dirty ginger-haired swine, it's you, is it? What have you done with them vallables?'

"I tell you, I was struck all of a heap. Never seen the man in my life. But he went on at me and made such a row, the nurse came running in to see what was up. All the men were sitting up in bed listening—you never saw anything like it.

"The upshot was, as soon as I could understand what this fellow was driving at, that he'd been sharing a shell hole with a chap that he said was me, and that this chap and he had talked together a bit, and then, when he was weak and helpless, the chap had looted his money and watch and revolver and whatnot and gone off with them. A nasty, dirty trick, and I couldn't blame him for making a row about it, if true.

"But I said and stood to it, it wasn't me, but some other fellow of the same name. He said he recognized me—said he and this other chap had been together a whole day, and he knew every feature in his face and couldn't be mistaken. However, it seemed this bloke had said he belonged to the Blankshires, and I was able to show my papers and prove I belonged to the Buffs, and eventually the bloke apologized and said he must have made a mistake.

"He died, anyhow, a few days after, and we all agreed he must have been wandering a bit. The two divisions were fighting side by side in that dust-up and it was possible for them to get mixed up. I tried afterwards to find out whether by any chance I had a double in the Blankshires, but they sent me back home, and before I was fit again the Armistice was signed, and I didn't take any more trouble.

"I went back to my old job after the war, and things seemed to settle down a bit. I got engaged when I was twenty-one to a regular good girl, and I thought everything in the garden was lovely. And then, one day—up it all went! My mother was dead then, and I was living by myself in lodgings.

"Well, one day I got a letter from my intended, saying that she had seen me down at Southend on the Sunday, and that was enough for her. All was over between us.

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"Now, it was most unfortunate that I'd had to put off seeing her that week-end, owing to an attack of influenza. It's a cruel thing to be ill all alone in lodgings, and nobody to look after you. You might die there all on your own and nobody the wiser. Just an unfurnished room I had, you see, and no attendance, and not a soul came near me, though I was pretty bad.

"But my young lady, she said as she had seen me down at Southend with another young woman, and she would take no excuse. Of course, I said, what was *she* doing down at Southend without me, anyhow, and that tore it. She sent me back the ring, and the episode, as they say, was closed.

"But the thing that troubled me was, I was getting that shaky in my mind, how did I know I *hadn't* been to Southend without knowing it? I thought I'd been half sick and half asleep in my lodgings, but it was misty-like to me. And knowing the things I had done other times—well, there!

"I hadn't any clear recollection one way or another, except fever dreams. I had a vague recollection of wandering and walking somewhere for hours together. Delirious, I thought I was, but it might have been sleepwalking for all I knew.

"I hadn't a leg to stand on by way of evidence. I felt it very hard, losing my intended like that, but I could have got over that if it hadn't been for the fear of myself and my brain giving way or something.

"You may think this is all foolishness and I was just being mixed up with some other fellow of the same name that happened to be very like me. But now I'll tell you something.

"Terrible dreams I got to having about that time. There was one thing as always haunted me—a thing that had frightened me as a little chap. My mother, though she was a good strict woman, liked to go to a cinema now and again. Of course, in those days they weren't like what they are now, and I expect we should think those old pictures pretty crude if we was to see them, but we thought a lot of them at that time.

"Well, when I was about seven or eight I should think, she took me with her to see a thing—I remember the name now—*The Student of Prague*, it was called. I've forgotten the story, but it was a costume piece—about a young fellow at the university who sold himself to the devil, and one day his reflection came stalking out of the mirror on its own, and went about committing dreadful crimes, so that everybody thought it was him. At least, I think it was that, but I forget the details, it's so long ago.

"But what I shan't forget in a hurry is the fright it gave me to see that dretful figure come out of the mirror. It was that ghastly to see it, I cried and yelled, and after a time

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mother had to take me out. For months and years after that I used to dream of it. I'd dream I was looking in a great long glass, same as the student in the picture, and after a bit I'd see my reflection smiling at me and I'd walk up to the mirror holding out my left hand, it might be, and seeing myself walking to meet me with its right hand out.

"And just as it came up to me, it would suddenly—that was the awful moment—turn its back on me and walk away into the mirror again, grinning over its shoulder, and suddenly I'd know that *it* was the real person and *I* was only the reflection, and I'd make a dash after it into the mirror. And then everything would go gray and misty round me and with the horror of it I'd wake up all of a perspiration."

"Uncommonly disagreeable," said Wimsey. "That legend of the *Doppelgänger*, it's one of the oldest and the most widespread and never fails to terrify me. When *I* was a kid, my nurse had a trick that frightened me. If we'd been out, and she was asked if we'd met anybody, she used to say, 'Oh, no—we saw nobody nicer than ourselves.' I used to toddle after her in terror of coming round a corner and seeing a horrid and similar pair pouncing out at us. Of course, I'd have rather died than tell a soul how the thing terrified me. Rum little beasts, kids."

The little man nodded thoughtfully.

"Well," he went on, "about that time the nightmare came back. At first it was only at intervals, you know, but it grew on me. At last it started coming every night. I hadn't hardly closed my eyes before there was the long mirror and the thing coming grinning along, always with its hand out as if it meant to catch hold of me and pull me through the glass.

"Sometimes I'd wake up with the shock, but sometimes the dream went on, and I'd be stumbling for hours through a queer sort of world—all mist and half lights, and the walls would be all crooked, like they are in that picture of Dr. Caligari. Lunatic, that's what it was. Many's the time I've sat up all night for fear of going to sleep. I didn't know, you see. I used to lock the bedroom door and hide the key for fear—you see, I didn't know what I might be doing.

"But then I read in a book that sleepwalkers can remember the places where they've hidden things when they were awake. So that was no use."

"Why didn't you get someone to share the room with you?"

"Well, I did." He hesitated. "I got a woman—she was a good kid. The dream went away then. I had blessed peace for three years. I was fond of that girl. Damned fond of her. Then she died."

He gulped down the last of his whiskey and blinked.

"Pneumonia, it was. Kind of

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broke me up. Pretty she was, too . . . After that, I was alone again. I felt bad about it, and then the dreams came back. Worse. I dreamed about doing things—well! That doesn't matter now.

"And one day it came in broad daylight . . .

"I was going along Holborn at lunchtime. I was still at Crichton's. Head of the packing department I was then, and doing pretty well. It was a wet beast of a day, I remember—dark and drizzling. I wanted a haircut. There's a barber shop on the south side, about halfway along —one of those places where you go down a passage and there's a door at the end with a mirror and the name written across it in gold letters. You know what I mean.

"I went in there. There was a light in the passage, so I could see quite plainly. As I got up to the mirror I could see my reflection coming to meet me, and all of a sudden the awful dream feeling came over me. I told myself it was all nonsense and put my hand out to the door handle—my left hand, because the handle was that side and I was still apt to be left-handed when I didn't think about it.

"The reflection, of course, put out its right hand—that was all right, of course—and I saw my own figure in my old squash hat and burberry—but the face—oh, my God! It was grinning at me—and then just like in the dream, it suddenly turned its back and walked away from me, looking over its shoulder—

"I had my hand on the door, and it opened, and I felt myself stumbling and falling over the threshold.

"After that, I don't remember anything more. I woke up in my own bed and there was a doctor with me. He told me I had fainted in the street, and they'd found some letters on me with my address and taken me home.

"I told the doctor all about it, and he said I was in a highly nervous condition and ought to find a change of work and get out in the open air more.

"They were very decent to me at Crichton's. They put me on to inspecting their outdoor publicity. You know. One goes round from town to town inspecting the hoardings and seeing what posters are damaged or badly placed and reporting on them. They gave me a Morgan to run about in. I'm on that job now.

"The dreams are better. But I still have them. Only a few nights ago it came to me. One of the worst I've ever had. Fighting and strangling in a black misty place. I'd tracked the devil—my other self—and got him down. I can feel my fingers on his throat now—killing myself.

"That was in London. I'm always worse in London. Then I came up here . . .

"You see why that book interested me. The fourth dimension—

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it's not a thing I ever heard of, but this man Wells seems to know all about it. You're educated now. Dare say you've been to college and all that. What do you think about it, eh?"

"I should think, you know," said Wimsey, "it was more likely your doctor was right. Nerves and all that."

"Yes, but that doesn't account for me having got twisted round the way I am, now, does it? Legends, you talked of. Well, there's some people think those medeeval johnnies knew quite a lot. I don't say I believe in devils and all that. But maybe some of them may have been afflicted, same as me. It stands to reason they wouldn't talk such a lot about it if they hadn't felt it, if you see what I mean. But what I'd like to know is, can't I get back any way? I tell you, it's a weight on my mind. I never know, you see."

"I shouldn't worry too much, if I were you," said Wimsey. "I'd stick to the fresh-air life. And I'd get married. Then you'd have a check on your movements, don't you see. And the dreams might go away again."

"Yes. Yes. I've thought of that. But—did you read about that man the other day? Strangled his wife in his sleep, that's what he did. Now, supposing I—that would be a terrible thing to happen to a man, wouldn't it? Those dreams . . ."

He shook his head and stared thoughtfully into the fire. Wimsey, after a short interval of silence, got up and went out into the bar. The landlady and the waiter and the barmaid were there, their heads close together over the evening paper. They were talking animatedly, but stopped abruptly at the sound of Wimsey's footsteps.

Ten minutes later, Wimsey returned to the lounge. The little man had gone. Taking up his motoring coat, which he had flung on a chair, Wimsey went upstairs to his bedroom. He undressed slowly and thoughtfully, put on his pajamas and dressing gown, and then, pulling a copy of the *Evening News* from his motoring-coat-pocket, he studied a front-page item attentively for some time.

Presently he appeared to come to some decision, for he got up and opened his door cautiously. The passage was empty and dark. Wimsey switched on a torch and walked quietly along, watching the floor. Opposite one of the doors he stopped, contemplating a pair of shoes which stood waiting to be cleaned. Then he softly tried the door. It was locked. He tapped cautiously.

A red head emerged.

"May I come in a moment?" said Wimsey in a whisper.

The little man stepped back, and Wimsey followed him in.

"What's up?" said Mr. Duckworthy.

"I want to talk to you," said Wimsey. "Get back into bed, because it may take some time."

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The little man looked at him, scared, but did as he was told. Wimsey gathered the folds of his dressing gown closely about him, screwed his monocle more firmly into his eye, and sat down on the edge of the bed.

He looked at Mr. Duckworthy a few minutes without speaking, and then said, "Look here. You've told me a queerish story tonight. For some reason I believe you. Possibly it only shows what a silly ass I am, but I was born like that, so it's past praying for. Nice trusting nature and so on. Have you seen the paper this evening?"

He pushed the *Evening News* into Mr. Duckworthy's hand and bent the monocle on him more glassily than ever.

On the front page was a photograph. Underneath was a panel in bold type, boxed for greater emphasis:

"The police at Scotland Yard are anxious to get into touch with the original of this photograph, which was found in the handbag of Miss Jessie Haynes, whose dead body was found strangled on Barnes Common last Thursday morning. The photograph bears on the back the words *J.H. with love from R.D.* Anybody recognizing the photograph is asked to communicate immediately with Scotland Yard or any police station."

Mr. Duckworthy looked, and grew so white that Wimsey thought he was going to faint.

"Well?" said Wimsey.

"Oh, God, sir! Oh, God! It's come at last." He whimpered and pushed the paper away, shuddering. "I've always known something of this would happen. But as sure as I'm born I knew nothing about it."

"It's you all right, I suppose?"

"The photograph's me all right. Though how it came there I *don't* know. I haven't had one taken for donkey's years, on my oath I haven't —except once in a staff group at Crichton's. But I tell you, sir, honest to God, there's times when I don't know what I'm doing, and that's a fact."

Wimsey examined the portrait feature by feature.

"Your nose, now—it has a slight twist to the right, and so it has in the photograph. The left eyelid droops a little. That's correct, too. The forehead here seems to have a distinct bulge on the left side—unless that's an accident in the printing."

"No!" Mr. Duckworthy swept his tousled cowlick aside. "It's very conspicuous—unsightly, I always think, so I wear the hair over it."

With the ginger lock pushed back, his resemblance to the photograph was more startling than before.

"My mouth's crooked, too."

"So it is. Slants up to the left. Very attractive, a one-sided smile, I always think—on a face of your type, that is. Although I have

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known such things to look positively sinister."

Mr. Duckworthy smiled a faint crooked smile.

"Do you know this girl, Jessie Haynes?"

"Not in my right senses, I don't, sir. Never heard of her—except, of course, that I read about the murder in the papers. Strangled—oh, my God!"

He pushed his hands out in front of him and stared woefully at them.

"What can I do? If I was to get away—"

"You can't. They've recognized you down in the bar. The police will probably be here in a few minutes. No"—as Duckworthy made an attempt to get out of bed—"don't do that. It's no good, and it would only get you into worse trouble. Keep quiet and answer one or two questions. First of all, do you know who I am? No, how should you? My name's Wimsey—Lord Peter Wimsey——"

"The detective?"

"If you like to call it that. Now, listen. Where was it you lived at Brixton?"

The little man gave the address.

"Your mother's dead. Any other relatives?"

"There was an aunt. She came from somewhere in Surrey, I think. Aunt Susan, I used to call her. I haven't seen her since I was a kid."

"Married?"

"Yes—oh, yes—Mrs. Susan Brown."

"Right. Were you left-handed as a child?"

"Well, yes, I was, at first. But mother broke me of it."

"And the tendency came back after the air raid. And were you ever ill as a child? To have the doctor, I mean?"

"I had measles once, when I was about four."

"Remember the doctor's name?"

"They took me to the hospital."

"Oh, of course. Do you remember the name of the barber in Holborn?"

This question came so unexpectedly that it staggered the wits of Mr. Duckworthy, but after a while he said he thought it was Biggs or Briggs.

Wimsey sat thoughtfully for a moment, and then said, "I think that's all. Except—oh, yes. What is your Christian name?"

"Robert."

"And you assure me that, so far as you know, you had no hand in this business?"

"That," said the little man, "that I swear to. As far as I know, you know. Oh, my Lord! If only it was possible to prove an alibi! That's my only chance. But I'm so afraid, you see, that I *may* have done it. Do you think—do you think they would hang me for that?"

"Not if you could prove you knew nothing about it," said Wimsey. He did not add that, even so, his acquaintance might probably pass the rest of his life at Broadmoor.

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"And you know," said Mr. Duckworthy, "if I'm to go about all my life killing people without knowing it, it would be much better that they should hang me and be done with it. It's a terrible thing to think of."

"Yes, but you may not have done it."

"I hope not, I'm sure," said Mr. Duckworthy. "I say—what's that?"

"The police, I fancy," said Wimsey lightly. He stood up as a knock came at the door, and said heartily, "Come in!"

The landlord, who entered first, seemed rather taken aback by Wimsey's presence.

"Come right in," said Wimsey hospitably. "Come in, Sergeant. What can we do for you?"

"Don't," said the landlord, "don't make a row if you can help it."

The police sergeant paid no attention to either of them, but stalked across to the bed and confronted the shrinking Mr. Duckworthy.

"It's the man all right," he said. "Now, Mr. Duckworthy, you'll excuse this late visit, but as you may have seen by the papers, we've been looking for a person answering your description, and there's no time like the present. We want—"

"I didn't do it," cried Mr. Duckworthy wildly. "I know nothing about it—"

The officer who had come in with the sergeant pulled out his notebook and wrote: "He said before any question was asked him, 'I didn't do it.' "

"You seem to know all about it," said the sergeant.

"Of course he does," said Wimsey. "We've been having a little informal chat about it."

"You have, have you? And who might you be—sir?" The last word appeared to be screwed out of the sergeant forcibly by the action of the monocle.

"I'm so sorry," said Wimsey, "I haven't a card on me at the moment. I am Lord Peter Wimsey."

"Oh, indeed," said the sergeant. "And may I ask, my lord, what you know about this here?"

"You may, and I may answer if I like. I know nothing at all about the murder. About Mr. Duckworthy I know what he has told me and no more. I dare say he will tell you, too, if you ask him nicely. But no third degree, you know, Sergeant."

Baulked by this painful reminder, the sergeant said, in a voice of annoyance, "It's my duty to ask him what he knows about this."

"I quite agree," said Wimsey. "As a good citizen, it's his duty to answer you. But it's a gloomy time of night, don't you think? Why not wait till the morning? Mr. Duckworthy won't run away."

"I'm not so sure of that."

"Oh, but I am. I will undertake to produce him whenever you want him. Won't that do? You're not charging him with anything, I suppose?"

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"Not yet," said the sergeant.

"Splendid. Then it's all quite friendly and pleasant, isn't it? How about a drink?"

The sergeant refused this kindly offer with some gruffness in his manner.

"On the wagon?" inquired Wimsey sympathetically. "Bad luck. Kidneys? Or liver, eh?"

The sergeant made no reply.

"Well, we are charmed to have had the pleasure of seeing you," pursued Wimsey. "You'll look us up in the morning, won't you? I've got to get back to town fairly early, but I'll drop in at the police station on my way. You will find Mr. Duckworthy in the lounge, here. It will be more comfortable for you than at your place. Must you be going? Well, good night, all."

Later Wimsey returned to Mr. Duckworthy, after seeing the police off the premises.

"Listen," he said, "I'm going up to town to do what I can. I'll send you a solicitor first thing in the morning. Tell him what you've told me, and tell the police what he tells you to tell them and no more. Remember, they can't force you to say anything or even go down to the police station unless they charge you. If they do charge you, go quietly and say nothing. And whatever you do, don't run away, because if you do, you're done for."

Wimsey arrived in town the following afternoon, and walked down Holborn, looking for a barber shop. He found it without much difficulty. It lay, as Mr. Duckworthy had described it, at the end of a narrow passage, and it had a long mirror in the door, with the name Briggs scrawled across it in gold letters.

Wimsey stared at his own reflection distastefully.

"Check Number One," he said, mechanically setting his tie to rights. "Have I been led up the garden path? Or is it really a fourth dimensional mystery?

" 'The animals went in four by four, *vive la compagnie!* The camel he got stuck in the door.' There is something intensely unpleasant about making a camel of one's self. It goes for days without a drink and its table manners are objectionable. But there is no doubt that this door is made of looking glass. Was it always so, I wonder? On, Wimsey, on. I cannot bear to be shaved again. Perhaps a haircut might be managed."

He pushed the door open, keeping a stern eye on his reflection to see that it played him no trick.

Of his conversation with the barber, which was lively and varied, only one passage is deserving of record.

"It's some time since I was in here," said Wimsey. "Keep it short behind the ears. Been redecorated, haven't you?"

"Yes, sir. Looks quite smart, doesn't it?"

"The mirror on the outside of

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the door—that's new, too, isn't it?"

"Oh, no, sir. That's been there ever since we took over."

"Has it? Then it's longer ago than I thought. Was it there three years ago?"

"Oh, yes, sir. Ten years Mr. Briggs has been here, sir."

"And the mirror too?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Then it's my memory that's wrong. Senile decay setting in. 'All, all are gone, the old familiar landmarks.' No, thanks, if I go gray I'll go gray decently. I don't want any hair tonics today, thank you. No, nor even an electric comb. I've had shocks enough."

It worried him, though. So much so that when he emerged, he walked back a few yards along the street, and was suddenly struck by seeing the glass door of a tea shop. It also lay at the end of a dark passage and had a gold name written across it. The name was "The BRIDGET Tea Shop," but the door was of plain glass.

Wimsey looked at it for a few moments and then went in. He did not approach the tea tables, but accosted the cashier, who sat at a little glass desk inside the door.

Here he went straight to the point and asked whether the young lady remembered the circumstance of a man's having fainted in the doorway some years previously.

The cashier could not say; she had only been there three months, but she thought one of the waitresses might remember. The waitress was produced, and after some consideration, thought she did recollect something of the sort.

Wimsey thanked her, said he was a journalist—which seemed to be accepted as an excuse for eccentric questions—parted with half a crown, and withdrew.

His next visit was to Carmelite House. Wimsey had friends in every newspaper office in Fleet Street, and made his way without difficulty to the room where photographs are filed for reference. The original of the "J.D." portrait was produced for his inspection.

"One of yours?" he asked.

"Oh, no. Sent out by Scotland Yard. Why? Anything wrong with it?"

"Nothing. I wanted the name of the original photographer, that's all."

"Oh! Well, you'll have to ask them there. Nothing more I can do for you?"

"Nothing, thanks."

Scotland Yard was easy. Chief Inspector Parker was Wimsey's closest friend. An inquiry of him soon furnished the photographer's name, which was inscribed at the foot of the print. Wimsey voyaged off at once in search of the establishment, where his name readily secured an interview with the proprietor.

As he had expected, Scotland Yard had been there before him. All information at the disposal of

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the firm had already been given. It amounted to very little. The photograph had been taken a couple of years previously, and nothing particular was remembered about the sitter. It was a small establishment, doing a rapid business in cheap portraits, and with no pretensions to artistic refinements.

Wimsey asked to see the original negative, which, after some search, was produced.

Wimsey looked it over, laid it down, and pulled from his pocket the copy of the *Evening News* in which the print had appeared.

"Look at this," he said.

The proprietor looked, then looked back at the negative.

"Well, I'm dashed," he said. "That's funny."

"It was done in the enlarging lantern, I take it," said Wimsey.

"Yes. It must have been put in the wrong way round. Now, fancy that happening. You know, sir, we often have to work against time, and I suppose—but it's very careless. I shall have to inquire into it."

"Get me a print of it right way round," said Wimsey.

"Yes, sir, certainly, sir. At once."

"And send one to Scotland Yard."

"Yes, sir. Queer it should have been just this particular one, isn't it, sir? I wonder the party didn't notice. But we generally take three or four positions, and he might not remember, you know."

"You'd better see if you've got any other positions and let me have them too."

"I've done that already, sir, but there are none. No doubt this one was selected and the others destroyed. We don't keep all the rejected negatives, you know, sir. We haven't the space to file them. But I'll get prints off at once."

"Do," said Wimsey. "The sooner the better. Quick-dry them. And don't do any work on the prints."

"No, sir. You shall have them in an hour or two, sir. But it's astonishing to me that the party didn't complain."

"It's not astonishing," said Wimsey. "He probably thought it the best likeness of the lot. And so it would be—to him. Don't you see—that's the only view he could ever take of his own face. That photograph, with the left and right sides reversed, is the face he sees in the mirror every day—the only face he can really recognize as his. 'Wad the gods the giftie gie us,' and all that."

"Well, that's quite true, sir. And I'm much obliged to you for pointing the mistake out."

Wimsey reiterated the need for haste, and departed. A brief visit to Somerset House followed; after which he called it a day and went home.

Inquiry in Brixton, in and about the address mentioned by Mr. Duckworthy, eventually put Wimsey on to the track of persons who

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had known him and his mother. An aged lady who had kept a small grocery in the same street for the last forty years remembered all about them. She had the encyclopedic memory of the almost illiterate, and was positive as to the date of their arrival.

"Thirty-two years ago, if we lives another month," she said. "Michaelmas it was they come. She was a nice-looking young woman, too, and my daughter, as was expecting her first, took a lot of interest in the sweet little boy."

"The boy was not born here?"

"Why, no, sir. Born somewheres on the south side, he was, but I remember she never rightly said where—only that it was round about the New Cut. She was one of the quiet sort and kep' herself to herself. Never one to talk, she wasn't. Why even to my daughter, as might 'ave good reason for bein' interested, she wouldn't say much about 'ow she got through 'er bad time. Chlorryform she said she 'ad, I know, and she disremembered about it, but it's my belief it 'ad gone 'ard with 'er and she didn't care to think overmuch about it.

"'Er 'usband—a nice man 'e was, too—'e says to me, 'Don't remind 'er of it, Mrs. 'Arbottle, don't remind 'er of it.' Whether she was frightened or whether she was 'urt by it I don't know, but she didn't 'ave no more children. 'Lor!' I says to 'er time and again, 'you'll get used to it, my dear, when you've 'ad nine of 'em same as me,' and she smiled, but she never 'ad no more, none the more for that."

"I suppose it does take some getting used to," said Wimsey, "but nine of them don't seem to have hurt *you*, Mrs. Harbottle, if I may say so. You look extremely flourishing."

"I keeps my 'ealth, sir, I am glad to say, though stouter than I used to be. Nine of them does 'ave a kind of spreading action on the figure. You wouldn't believe, sir, to look at me now, as I 'ad a eighteen-inch waist when I was a girl. Many's the time me pore mother broke the laces on me, with 'er knee in me back and me 'oldin' on to the bedpost."

"One must suffer to be beautiful," said Wimsey politely. "How old was the baby, then, when Mrs. Duckworthy came to live in Brixton?"

"Three weeks old, 'e was, sir—a darling dear—and a lot of 'air on 'is 'ead. Black 'air it was then, but it turned into the brightest red you ever see—like them carrots there. It wasn't so pretty as 'is ma's, though much the same color. He didn't favor 'er in the face, neither, nor yet 'is dad. She said 'e took after some of 'er side of the family."

"Did you ever see any of the rest of the family?"

"Only 'er sister, Mrs. Susan Brown. A big, stern, 'ard-faced woman she was—not like 'er sister. Lived at Evesham she did, as well

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I remembers. Stiff, she was, with a small 'ead, very like a stick o' grass."

Wimsey thanked Mrs. Harbottle in a suitable manner and took the next train to Evesham. He was beginning to wonder where the chase might lead him, but discovered, much to his relief, that Mrs. Susan Brown was well known in the town, being a pillar of the Methodist Chapel and a person well respected.

She was upright still, with smooth, dark hair parted in the middle and drawn tightly back—a woman broad in the base and narrow in the shoulder—not, indeed, unlike the stick of asparagus to which Mrs. Harbottle had compared her.

She received Wimsey with stern civility, but disclaimed all knowledge of her nephew's movements. The hint that he was in a position of some embarrassment, and even danger, did not appear to surprise her.

"There was bad blood in him," she said. "My sister Hetty was softer by half than she ought to have been."

"Ah!" said Wimsey. "Well, we can't all be people of strong character, though it must be a source of great satisfaction to those that are. I don't want to be a trouble to you, madam, and I know I'm given to twaddling rather, being a trifle on the soft side myself—so I'll get to the point. I see by the register at Somerset House that your nephew, Robert Duckworthy, was born in Southwark, the son of Alfred and Hester Duckworthy. Wonderful system they have there. But of course—being only human—it breaks down now and again, doesn't it?"

She folded her wrinkled hands over one another on the edge of the table, and he saw a kind of shadow flicker over her sharp dark eyes.

"If I'm not bothering you too much—in what name was the other registered?"

The hands trembled a little, but she said steadily, "I do not understand you."

"I'm frightfully sorry. Never was good at explaining myself. There were twin boys born, weren't there? Under what name did they register the other? I'm so sorry to be a nuisance, but it's really rather important."

"What makes you suppose there were twins?"

"Oh, I don't suppose it. I wouldn't have bothered you about a supposition. I *know* there was a twin brother. What became—at least, I do know more or less what became of him—"

"It died," she said hurriedly.

"I hate to seem contradictory," said Wimsey. "Most unattractive behavior. But it didn't die, you know. In fact, it's alive now. It's only the name I want to know."

"And why should I tell you anything, young man?"

"Because," said Wimsey, "if you will pardon the mention of anything so disagreeable to a refined taste, there's been a murder com-

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mitted and your nephew Robert is suspected. As a matter of fact, I happen to know that the murder was done by the twin brother. That's why I want to get hold of him, don't you see.

"It would be such a relief to my mind—I am naturally nice-minded—if you would help me to find him. Because, if not, I shall have to go to the police, and then you might be subpoena'd as a witness, and I shouldn't like— I *really* shouldn't like—to see you in the witness box at a murder trial. So much unpleasant publicity, don't you know. Whereas, if we can lay hands on the brother quickly, you and Robert need never come into it at all."

Mrs. Brown sat in grim thought for a few minutes.

"Very well," she said, "I will tell you."

"Of course," said Wimsey to Chief Inspector Parker a few days later, "the whole thing was quite obvious when one had heard about the reversal of friend Duckworthy's interior economy."

"No doubt, no doubt," said Parker. "Nothing could be simpler. But all the same, you are aching to tell me how you deduced it and I am willing to be instructed. Are all twins wrong-sided? And are all wrong-sided people twins?"

"Yes. No. Or rather, no, yes. Dissimilar or fraternal twins and some kinds of identical twins may both be quite normal. But the kind of identical twins that result from the splitting of a single cell *may* come out as looking-glass twins. It depends on the line of fission in the original cell. You can do it artificially with tadpoles and a bit of horsehair."

"I will make a note to do it at once," said Parker gravely.

"In fact, I've read somewhere that a person with a reversed inside practically always turns out to be one of a pair of identical twins. So you see, while poor old R.D. was burbling on about the *Student of Prague* and the fourth dimension, I was expecting the identical twin brother.

"Apparently what happened was this: there were three sisters of the name of Dart—Susan, Hester, and Emily. Susan married a man called Brown; Hester married a man called Duckworthy; Emily was unmarried. By one of those cheery little ironies of which life is so full, the only sister who had a baby, or who was apparently capable of having babies, was the unmarried Emily. By way of compensation, she overdid it and had twins.

"When this catastrophe was about to occur, Emily—deserted, of course, by the father—confided in her sisters, the parents being dead. Susan was a tartar—besides, she had married above her station and was climbing steadily on a ladder of good works. She delivered herself of a few texts and washed her hands of the business.

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"Hester was a kind-hearted soul. She offered to adopt the infant, when produced, and bring it up as her own. Well, the baby came, and, as I said before, it was twins.

"That was a bit too much for Mr. Duckworthy. He had agreed to one baby, but twins were more than he had bargained for. Hester was allowed to pick her twin, and, being a kindly soul, she picked the weaklier-looking one, which was our Robert—the mirror-image twin. Emily had to keep the other, and, as soon as she was strong enough, decamped with him to Australia, after which she was no more heard of.

"Emily's twin was registered in her own name of Dart and baptized Richard. Robert was registered as Hester Duckworthy's own child—there were no tiresome rules in those days requiring notification of births by doctors and midwives, so one could do as one liked about these matters. The Duckworthys', complete with baby, moved to Brixton where Robert was looked upon as being a perfectly genuine little Duckworthy.

"Apparently Emily died in Australia, and Richard, then a boy of fifteen, worked his passage home to London. He does not seem to have been a nice little boy. Two years afterwards, his path crossed that of Brother Robert and produced the episode of the air raid night.

"Hester may have known about the wrong-sidedness of Robert, or she may not. Anyway, Robert wasn't told. I imagine that the shock of the explosion caused him to revert more strongly to his natural left-handed tendency. It also seems to have induced a new tendency to amnesia under similar shock conditions. The whole thing preyed on his mind, and he became more and more somnambulant.

"Richard, of course, discovered the existence of his double and turned it to account. That explains the central incident of the mirror. I think Robert must have mistaken the glass door of the tea shop for the door of the barber shop. It really *was* Richard who came to meet him, and who retired again so hurriedly for fear of being seen and noted. Circumstances played into Richard's hands, of course—but these meetings did take place, and the fact that they were both wearing soft hats and burberries is not astonishing on a dark wet day.

"And then there is the photograph. No doubt the original mistake was the photographer's, but I shouldn't be surprised if Richard welcomed it and chose that particular print on that account. Though that would mean, of course, that he knew about the wrong-sidedness of Robert. I don't know how he could have done that, but he may have had opportunities for inquiry. It was known in the Army, and rumors may have got round. But I won't press that point.

"There's one rather queer thing—

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that Robert should have had that dream about strangling on the very night, as far as one could make out, that Richard was engaged in doing away with Jessie Haynes. They say that identical twins are always in close sympathy with one another—that each knows what the other is thinking about, for instance, and contracts the same illness on the same day and all that sort of thing. Richard was the stronger twin of the two, and no doubt dominated Robert. The point is, you've found him all right."

"Yes. Once we'd got the clue there was no difficulty."

"Well, let's toddle round to the Cri and have one."

Wimsey got up and fixed his tie before the glass.

"All the same," he said, "there's something queer about mirrors. Uncanny a bit, don't you think?"

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THE FREYA OF FIRE ISLAND

by JANE SPEED

AT OCEAN BEACH, LARGEST OF THE summer communities that lie scattered the length of Fire Island, the most popular beach sport by far is Bikini-watching. And after devoting the better part of two weeks to this absorbing activity, Arnie Cantrell, bon vivant, philosopher, and junior copywriter, had come to what he felt were certain definitive conclusions on the subject.

It was not, he'd decided, merely the scantiness of the costume that caught and held the male eye. After all, girls' bathing suits, whatever the per square inch of exposure they afforded, had never within Arnie's memory left much to the imagination. No, the hypnotic appeal of the Bikini lay rather in the interesting possibility, real or apparent, that it might at any moment drop off.

Granted he had not yet had the good fortune to witness such a lively spectacle, even on those rare occasions when girls were permitted to slow down the volley ball game forever in progress on the beach; but—there's a first time for everything.

Arnie cast an appraising glance now at a paisley and a lace-trimmed white walking by to his left, lingered a hopeful moment over a low-slung madras just behind the other two, and then came to what was very nearly a whistle stop on a breathtakingly brief and simple black that was no more than fifteen feet ahead of him.

She was standing at about a three-quarter turn away from him, looking down the beach for something or someone. Arnie ran his eye appreciatively from a firmly planted slim brown foot right up to the wind-blown hair that a combination of sun and salt water had given the

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color and texture of pale straw. And the whole was not only equal to the sum of its enchanting parts, it was indefinably more and better. There was something arresting just in the way she stood. Like the Norse goddess Freya was the best Arnie could come up with—the Freya of Fire Island.

But there was something else, too. Was it—could it possibly be—a hint of loneliness? *Oh, watch it, Arnie boy, watch it,* warned his trusty inner cynic; *let's not fall into the old male rationale that any appetizing female is (a) lonely, (b) misunderstood and/or (c) harboring an 18-karat brain under that fluffy coiffure.*

Still, not to be caught unprepared, Arnie rapidly rehearsed a variation of his most successful gambit and was just starting to raise himself from his beach towel when she suddenly faced around and stood gazing out over his head. Arnie sat weakly back on his heels.

She was scanning the far reaches of the beach with determined concentration and quite unconscious of his stare. But even if she had looked full at him he couldn't have taken his eyes off that face.

Real. That was the only word for it. It was so real it took his breath away. Not merely straight and pure of line but straight of intent. Her face, brows, lashes were all the same dark-honey color as the rest of her body. There wasn't a whisper of make-up to distract from the burning forthrightness of those blue, blue eyes. Arnie couldn't remember when he'd seen anything as uncompromisingly genuine as that face.

He was overcome all of a sudden with a sort of schoolboy shame at the very ordinariness of the thoughts he'd been entertaining about her. But what could have prepared him for this? That blatantly phony hair, even the Bikini . . . Not, God knows, that he had a thing in the world against the Wearing of the Bikini. But still, it did indicate a certain coy willingness to display that didn't go at all with this particular face. He felt disoriented somehow, as though he'd examined a perfectly ordinary brass ring and found it to be solid gold.

She turned then and started for the wooden steps at the far end of the beach and, quite unbidden, Arnie's hand went out toward her in a vain gesture. Then he dropped it with a shrug and a sigh. Even if he could have caught her attention, what then? How do you go about addressing a visitor from Mount Olympus? "Pray tell me, dear goddess, what ever persuaded you to get yourself up in these gross mortal trappings?"

He stood up abruptly and strode into the water to wash off both the sand and his mood. He dived into the rising wave and came up in the soothing calm beyond the breakers. After a few minutes things began to slide into perspective again. And they clicked firmly into the groove

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of business-as-usual when, as he came back on the beach, he caught sight of Hilda Washburn descending the wooden steps.

Hilda Washburn was one of the most steadily employed supporting actresses in the theater—a thoroughgoing professional according to her admirers, an uninspired workhorse in the eyes of her detractors. But taken either way, there was no escaping the fact that few Broadway seasons had come and gone in the past 25 years without Hilda on the boards.

She and her husband, Phil Washburn, a highly successful dabbler in the peripheral areas of theater and television, were celebrities-in-residence of long standing at Ocean Beach. Other, brighter names flashed in and out for a week-end or even a season or two, but Hilda and Phil endured, Ocean Beach's own. Their pink cottage, the Hi-Phi, standing on its fragile-looking poles beyond the crest of a dune and patiently restored after the ravages of every hurricane, was a local landmark.

Arnie watched now, without seeming to, as Hilda and a friend planted their beach umbrella and arranged their low folding chairs beneath it. Then, rubbing at his wet hair with his towel, he strolled in their direction. Just as he came up beside them he pulled the towel away from his face.

"Hil-da!" he said, giving it a real long-time-no-see ring.

"Why—hello there." She smothered her puzzled surprise in a brilliant all-purpose smile.

She couldn't possibly remember him. Arnie had met her exactly once in a hastily mumbled group introduction when she'd stopped around at a rehearsal for a television commercial that Phil was producing for Arnie's advertising agency. But Arnie was counting on Hilda's reputation as a devout anti-snob. Speak first, get acquainted later was the line she had long ago settled on and she was said to hew to it unswervingly.

She didn't fail him. "Faye," she began, turning to her friend, "this is—"

"Arnie Cantrell," he put in smoothly and extended his hand to the tall, bony brunette. "I'm with the Coulter-Goodstein Agency. Worked with Phil on the Plastikool account." He was treated to a little bonus of warmth in Hilda's glance for picking up his cue so deftly.

"Arnie, Faye Leonard."

"Hi, Arnie," said Faye, switching her luxuriant ponytail at him.

Having thus established himself in their company, he stretched out on his towel, a presentable enough foot-loose male prepared to pay unobtrusive court to them for the next hour or so by his mere presence and by an occasional quietly pithy remark.

"You going in?" Faye asked Hilda, nodding toward the ocean.

"Not today. I've got to save my

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strength. It's going to be a very large evening."

"Do you think The Great Man will really show up?"

"He'd just better. Phil's been turning himself inside out to make sure it comes off. He gave his word to half a dozen people that Mort will positively put in an appearance at our place tonight."

They were talking about producer Mort Sabin who was week-ending in Ocean Beach with his current wife. It was Arnie's firm intention to meet this man before the week-end was over.

"Well," Faye was saying, "at least they're in Ocean Beach. That's something. Which is this—his third or fourth wife?"

"Mmm, let me see . . . fourth. Yes, his fourth. But unless I misread the signs, she's already on her way out. I can't imagine why she came out here with him. He just ignores her completely."

"But what a shame. She's really rather lovely."

"They've all been lovely. *And* crazy about him. Remember Karen Ashley? She was the one before last. Such a weeping and wailing went on when she got her walking papers." Hilda sighed. "Poor things. They might as well save their breath. When Mort's finished with them—that's it."

"There ought to be a law," grumbled Faye, fishing in her beach bag for a cigarette.

Hilda suddenly remembered Arnie. "Have you ever met Mort Sabin, Arnie?"

"Nope. I've never had the—what should I call it—pleasure?"

"That's a good question," said Faye with a laugh.

Hilda nodded. "You meet him for the first time prepared to find this monster you've always heard he is. And yet, I swear, in the course of five minutes' conversation, he'll make some point so—so devastatingly *right* that you're completely disarmed. You know, you feel there must be depths to this man no one's ever told you about. And then—just when you're practically won over, he'll do or say something so outrageously crass you're right back where you started. It's maddening. You just can't seem to pin the guy down."

"A kind of bastard with heart?" Arnie offered modestly.

Hilda and Faye looked at each other and then at Arnie in amused astonishment.

"But that's exactly *it*," gasped Faye.

"Nail on the head," marveled Hilda. "Come on now," she chided Arnie, "you *have* met him."

"Never. I swear." Arnie lifted his right hand in mock oath.

"Well, after that one you've got to," Hilda said. "Come by our place anytime after nine tonight. I guarantee you'll be amazed at how right you were."

"I might just do that," said Arnie, as indolently casual as though this

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invitation hadn't been the precise objective of his circuitous angling.

"I suppose," Faye conceded grudgingly, "what he does with his personal life is his business. What I can't take is the way he operates professionally. Look at all the people he's trampled on just to make sure his darling investments come out ahead. Because that's all they are to him, Hilda—investments. Don't try to tell me there's any love of the theater going there. That brute hasn't a scruple to his name."

"Oh, Lord, don't I know," groaned Hilda. "Still—think how many plays he's done in the last ten, eleven years—and hardly a flop among them. You may hate his guts, Faye, but how can you argue with success? It represents a lot of work for a lot of actors. And the playwrights! Even most of the established ones, no matter what they say, would give their eyeteeth to have Mort Sabin behind them. Then, if you count all the would-be's, why it's enough to keep Mort in demand for the next hundred years." She laughed. "There must be millions of them. Mort's always saying he'd enjoy the novelty sometime of meeting *some*one who didn't have an idea for the Great American Play."

Well, Mort baby, mused Arnie to himself, I aim to oblige. Oh, he had an idea for a play all right. But with one significant difference.

Some sage along Arnie's path had said that the story you talk about is the story you never write. And how true that was. Arnie had lost count of all the noble themes and sure-fire plots he'd heard talked into thin air in the wee hours at some bar. None of that for him, thanks. Arnie had no intention of telling Mort Sabin or anyone else about *his* play until it was down on paper to the last polished word.

Meanwhile, though, no harm in doing a little oiling of the wheels within wheels. He was going to meet Mort Sabin tonight. And he'd meet him again as many times and as many places as he could arrange in the next year or two that it would take him to finish the play. All he wanted, all he hoped for out of this was that when the time was ripe, he'd be no stranger to Mort Sabin.

"Sorry," Faye said, "you'll never sell me on that character. But I hope for Phil's sake he shows up tonight."

Hilda smiled complacently. "Somehow I have a feeling he will. Phil has some real live bait on the hook this time."

"What do you mean?"

"We have a house guest."

"I didn't know you had anyone staying with you this week-end."

"Well, I hope not. It's been very hush-hush. Phil just smuggled her and her agent in last night."

"But who is it?"

"Someone," Hilda went on tantalizingly, "Mort Sabin is *livid* to meet. He's determined to sign her for the play he's doing in the fall."

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"Oh, Hilda!" said Faye in exasperation. "Stop being so mysterious. Who *is* it?"

But Hilda wasn't going to be rushed out of playing this revelation to the hilt. She leaned forward slightly, hooked her deep-green beach towel onto one finger and pulled it just over a shoulder, providing, as she well knew, a striking background for her still lovely auburn hair. Then, enunciating each syllable with distinct delicacy, she said, "Diana Dalwyn."

The effect of her announcement left nothing to be desired. Faye fell back in her chair in limp amazement and Arnie, with an involuntary "I'll be damned," sat bolt upright.

Diana Dalwyn, according to the ecstatic reviews of her first film, still unreleased in the United States, was the British find of the century. A combination, if you could believe the advance notices, of the cream of the qualities of every top glamor queen in the world.

"But," Faye finally managed to splutter, "I didn't know she was even in the country."

"Just flew in last night with Manny Stern. Phil met them at the airport and brought them right out here. Manny and Phil are old friends. That's how he got all this cooked up."

"Well, what's she like?" Faye asked eagerly.

"Well," said Hilda, "we went to a private showing of her film in London last month. And, you know, I've got to admit it, she is really as good as they say."

"Gorgeous, I suppose?"

"Oh, that, naturally. But much more—kind of electrifying. And on top of it all, the girl can act!"

"Sounds," said Faye, "as though nothing could stop her. But what I meant was, what's she like personally?"

Hilda hesitated a moment, then replied. "Like what you said. Nothing can stop her." Her voice had become so sharply subdued that Faye and Arnie both looked at her in surprise. "God knows," Hilda went on, "I've seen hundreds of ambition-ridden actresses over the years. But none quite like this. I have really never before looked directly on such undisguised, cold-blooded drive. Well," she added with an attempt to shrug off the chill of her words, "you'll see what I mean when you meet her tonight." She began busily getting her things together. "Poor Manny though. He really has himself a tigress by the tail this time. I'm afraid the poor slob's going to get eaten alive."

Behind his heavy-lidded gaze Arnie had been listening, tensely alert. And with Hilda's every word he had grown more sinkingly certain that she was talking about the girl he had seen on the beach this afternoon. So much for his "goddess," he thought bitterly as he rose to help Hilda pull up the beach umbrella.

"I wonder," speculated Faye,

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"do you suppose Mort has Diana Dalwyn in mind for Mrs. Sabin Number Five?"

Hilda gave a knowing smile. "Could be," she said, nodding. "Could well be. After all, it's the unattainable that always attracts him. He'd probably consider the fact that he hasn't even met her yet a mere technicality." She folded up her chair. "But I'll tell you one thing, he's going to meet his match in this young Amazon. It is absolutely impossible to imagine *her* reduced to a weeping, pleading shambles. If there's any casting aside to be done in that combination, she'll be the one to do it."

Hilda put her hand out to Arnie as she and Faye turned to go. "Don't forget tonight, sweetie. As you can see, we have fireworks scheduled."

Arnie grinned. "I wouldn't miss it. Thanks, Hilda. 'Bye, Faye."

But as he picked up his towel and started down to the steps at the other end of the beach, the grin faded, and he couldn't seem to recapture the little glow of satisfaction he should have been feeling at "mission accomplished."

He went back to the cottage he shared with six other young men, took a bowl of tepid water out on the sun deck, and while he waited his turn at the shower, shaved in front of a cracked mirror propped on a chair.

Through it all the black mood stayed with him. Impatiently he yanked on a clean sweatshirt over his shorts, left the cottage, and walked up toward the bay. What the hell? So a blonde who'd caught his eye for a few minutes on the beach turned out to be like all the rest—worse, if Hilda was right about her. So what? But the bleak thought stabbed at him without warning: was that really all those eyes had held—naked ambition?

He ambled glumly along the bay walk trying to make up his mind where to eat. He wasn't particularly hungry, so he finally pushed into Tina's and settled for a pizza and a glass of beer. He still had a couple of hours to kill before he was due at Hilda's and Phil's, and he took his time, exchanging the usual inanities with the usual crowd.

When he came out, the ferry had just docked and people began pouring in from the slip. He threaded his way for a while through the new arrivals with their luggage-piled wagons, and considered stopping in somewhere for a drink. Then he decided against it, and turned back toward the ocean.

At the top of the wooden steps he stood for a moment looking at the nearly deserted beach. Then slowly he went down and sat on the bottom plank of the stairs.

It was not quite dark but a chill wind had sprung up, sending even the hardiest of the kite flyers back to their cottages. Arnie pulled up the hood of his sweatshirt and sat morosely watching the incoming

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tide eat its way in huge, measured bites up the broad expanse of sand. He picked up a stick and scraped ineffectually at some tar on the bottom of his foot. Then he threw the stick away in disgust and looked up.

And that's when he saw her again, standing down where the waves lapped over her feet.

She had her back to him and she was enveloped now in a great beach cape, but he never had a moment's doubt about who she was. There was that singular way she stood, and the brave, bright hair. And even now, after all he'd heard about her, he found the sight of her ineffably touching.

Well, the hell with that! He stood up angrily and started down toward the water. A couple of minutes' talk with a chilly success machine like her ought to break this idiotic spell she had cast over him.

"Hello," he said brusquely as he came up beside her.

She turned her head calmly, not at all startled. "Have you come for me?" she asked.

"Why—no," said Arnie, thrown off balance. "I just happened to be down here."

"Oh." She looked back at the ocean. "I thought perhaps they'd sent you to look for me."

There didn't seem to be any answer to that, so he just stood beside her and stared out at the breakers. The next one came in closer, curling frothily around their ankles.

"We're going to get more than our feet wet if we stay down here," he said.

He thought at first she hadn't heard him, but then she turned and followed him slowly back to the steps. He motioned her to a seat on the bottom one.

"Just for a minute," she said. "They'll be coming for me soon."

Arnie sat down beside her, confounded. What had happened to him? Arn the articulate, Old Never-at-a-Loss Arnie, couldn't think of a blasted thing to say to this creature who seemed content to sit silently contemplating the timeless ocean. Well, there was always the direct approach.

"I don't think I introduced myself. My name's Arnie Cantrell."

She looked at him then. "How do you do, Arnie," she said gravely. "My name's Eve — Eve Sabin." Then, before he had fully assimilated this stunning upset, she added, "I'm Mort Sabin's wife."

At the moment she started speaking he'd already had his mouth open and ready with the expected reply. It was quite a struggle just getting it closed. Then he had to open and close it several times, like a damned fish, before he could get any words out. And when they came, they couldn't have been worse. "I'm—sorry—"

One corner of her mouth twitched. "I see you've heard about me."

"No—no—" he stammered in desperation, "I didn't mean it that way. I—you see, I—I thought that

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you were someone else altogether."

"No." She spoke with finality. "I'm still—Mort Sabin's wife."

Her manner, as direct as her glance, demoralized Arnie utterly. He found his voice at last and the words came out with a rush—anything, everything, complete irrelevancies. He could no more have turned them off than he could have stopped the tide coming in. To his horror he even heard himself telling her every last detail about his play, about his hopes for Mort's eventual interest in it.

Not that it mattered. She wasn't even listening; she was just staring out at the ocean again. Then she turned and spoke quietly, "Please . . ."

The single word stopped Arnie's babbling instantly. Her eyes seemed to burn through his skull, reading accurately everything there. "You needn't be so embarrassed on my behalf," she said.

"I knew what he was like when I met him," she continued slowly, as though sorting things out in her own mind as she went along. "But he was so—insistent, so persuasive. He swore the others had meant nothing to him, that with me he had finally come home. He said I would be the last Mrs. Sabin. And I believed him—because for me it was true. For me, it still is. But not for Mort, not for a long time now. I tried—to change myself, to be something else so that he might look at me again. I even did this clown's thing with my hair. It made no difference, of course. Nothing could." She shrugged. "It's an old, old story. Not even very interesting."

A light flashed down at them suddenly from the top of the steps. Arnie, looking up, was blinded by the glare. It was only when one of the figures moved down a couple of steps that he saw it was one of the village police.

"Beg pardon," he said, "but have you seen—"

"I think you're looking for me," said Eve, rising.

"Are you Mrs. Mortimer Sabin?"

"Yes."

"Oh—well." The man seemed momentarily flustered at having the search end so abruptly. "Uh—Mrs. Sabin—I'm afraid your husband—"

"Yes, I know," Eve said gently. She moved up toward him and drawing her arm out from beneath her robe, handed him a gun. "I shot him. I'll go with you now."

She paused a moment at the railing and looked down.

"Goodbye, Arnie," she said. "I'm sorry I've upset your plans. But if your play is good, you'll find someone else to produce it."

Arnie could only nod dumbly. He watched her go up the steps and disappear with the two men.

He turned back to the sound of the ocean and sat there in the gathering darkness clenching and unclenching his fist. Suddenly he brought it down on the wood step with a crash. It hurt him so much he wept.

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A little known episode from one of the world's great classics

SANCHO PANZA, DETECTIVE

by MIGUEL DE CERVANTES

TWO OLD MEN NEXT PRESENTED themselves before Sancho Panza. One of them carried a cane in his hand for a staff; the other, who had no staff, said to Sancho, "My lord, some time ago I lent this man ten crowns of gold to oblige and serve him, upon condition that he should return them on demand. I let some time pass without asking for them, being loath to put him to a greater strait than he was in when I lent them.

"But at length, thinking it full time to be repaid, I asked him for my money more than once, but to no purpose: he not only refuses payment, but denies the debt, and says I never lent him any such sum, or, if I did, that he had already paid me.

"I have no witnesses to the loan, nor has he of the payment which he pretends to have made, but which I deny; yet if he will swear before your worship that he has returned the money, I from this minute acquit him before God and the world."

"What say you to this, old gentleman?" quoth Sancho.

"I confess, my lord," replied the old fellow, "that he did lend me the money, and if your worship pleases to hold down your wand of justice, since he leaves it to my oath, I will swear I have really and truly returned it to him."

Sancho Panza accordingly held down his wand, and the old fellow, seeming encumbered with his staff, gave it to his creditor to hold while he was swearing; and then taking hold of the cross of the wand, he said it was true indeed the other had lent him ten crowns, but that he had restored them to him into his own hand; but having, he supposed, forgotten it, the other was continually dunning him for them.

Upon which his lordship the governor demanded of the creditor what he had to say in reply to the solemn declaration he had heard.

The man said he could not doubt but that his debtor had sworn the truth, for he believed him to be an honest man and a good Christian; and that, as the fault must have been in his own memory, he would thenceforward ask no more for his money.

The debtor now took his staff again, and bowing to the governor, went out of the court.

Sancho then began to meditate,

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and laying the forefinger of his right hand upon his forehead, he continued a short time full of thought; and then raising his head, he ordered the old man with the staff to be called back.

"Honest friend," said the governor, "give me that staff, for I have occasion for it."

"With all my heart," answered the old fellow, and delivered it to him.

Sancho took it, and immediately giving it to the other old man, he said, "There, take that, and go about your business in God's name, for you are now paid."

"I paid, my lord!" answered the old man. "What, is this staff worth ten golden crowns?"

"Yes," quoth the governor, "or I am the greatest dunce in the world; and it shall now appear whether or not I have a head to govern a whole kingdom."

Sancho Panza then ordered the staff to be broken in court; which being done, ten crowns of gold were found within it.

All the spectators were struck with admiration, and began to look upon their new governor as a second Solomon. They asked him how he had discovered that the ten crowns were in the staff.

Sancho Panza told them that, having observed the defendant give it to the plaintiff to hold, while he took his oath that he had truly restored the money *into his own hands,* and that being done he took his staff again, it came into his head that the money in dispute must be inclosed within the staff. From this, he added, they might see that it sometimes pleased God to direct the judgments of those who govern, though otherwise they were little better than blockheads.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 268th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . An unusual—indeed, a remarkable—"first story": the writing, we think, will touch a deep chord in you, and the author tells her story relentlessly, with great drive and force. It is not a story you will forget easily . . .

Vaughan Greene has given us only a few details about herself. She lives in Washington, D. C., and if she had her way (that is how she expressed it), she would spend most of her time attempting to decipher the mystery that is everyone's life (also her phrase)—as she has tried to decipher the life of F.W., the protagonist in her "first story." She likes reading and writing, swimming and dancing and water-skiing, and listening to string quartets . . . all of which really tells us a great deal about a very talented newcomer.

SO THAT HE COULD DIE

by VAUGHAN GREENE

THEY TURNED THE LIGHT ON. So he knew night was here. Clanks and rattles, and the sounds of their feet, so that things lit up and got darker.

He reckoned he had until morning if, all of a sudden, time hadn't gotten mixed up in him. They would come in and tell him, tell him the time.

Seward thought he could hear rain somewhere, skittering and chilly-like, and reminding him of dark blue mornings.

In his lifetime he had often waked up long before morning, just to lie there listening to himself breathe, just listening and watching.

By the time morning come, he'd be long gone out to the cows. His cows that the neighbors said he liked to shoot buckshot at.

What they-all said must be on those there sheets of paper the cops and doctors had.

Seward was sane. That's how come he was here. And tomorrow, like as not, he'd wake long before, maybe make the motion of getting up off this here strange bed—"a bunk," they call it, like on a ship—as if he was still going to the cows.

Cows are warm and sweet at morning, but Seward never did like their udders and eyes. This can make you right mad.

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Sometime he had to take deep breaths to keep from throwing up the sweetness.

Crazy-like, he sudden wondered if the throwing up always leads to cops and doctors—there'd been a whole string of both.

Mostly Seward could recollect the cop that smelled of Juicy Fruit chewing gum, and the doctor with the rimless eyeglasses.

Short, kind of funny-looking fellow, this doctor, with a way of talking that was even more different than doctor-talk, and not like the doctor he'd once gone to, the day the tractor turned over on his leg. That doctor talked more natural-like.

Though, even natural, he must be in those there sheets of paper, too. Which said how Seward had drove himself into town with his foot so bad broke that it hung almost screwed off and around, heel frontwards, crawled up the steps to the doctor's office, said hurry up fix it 'cause I got to get back to work.

Work, because it won't do to go cryin' out and be a bother to people with your trouble.

"I have never seen a man with such an inhuman contempt for pain as this F. W. Seward," the local doctor had said—"testified," they call it, which did make him sound same's the foreign doctor.

"What is the F.W.?" the doctor that leads to this place here, the fellow with the rimless eyeglasses, had wanted to know.

"It don't mean nothing."

"What?"

"Nothing."

"Now, attention, when I ask you a question, I expect—"

"It just means what it says, sir. Just them two letters are my first name. I call myself Seward."

"Everyone around your farm states that you have been called F.W. since you were born."

"Then what the hell you askin' me for?"

"Now, attention, when I—"

"Sorry. They do call me that, yes. Well, but, *I* call *myself* Seward."

"I have never heard of naming a person merely two letters of the alphabet. You are certain?" The doctor had glare for two eyes, maybe on account of the light and the glasses. Light off the fingernails too, which looked polished but with a no-color polish. The rest of the hands reminded Seward of his wife. The difference being that she bites—bit—bit her nails.

"You . . . are you a doctor of medicine, could I ask?"

The doctor's plump hand dismissed the question, while the face got hard like the hand wasn't.

"He's a doctor in psychology, that's Ph.D.," the cop of the Juicy Fruit chewing gum had been nice enough to answer. "From some German university"—the cop's gum squeaked—"no less."

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The doctor not of medicine but from some German university asked lots of questions like all the other doctors of just before this here place. Or maybe it's just that all the questions sound alike.

Fellow didn't know farm equipment from nothing, and his face would get that hardness—maybe it's brainy-looking, so Seward went slow, running ahead of his own self to take out any farm-equipment words before he got to 'em.

But this was hard to do.

"Plow points, Doctor. P-l-o-w, and then 'points' is what I weighted her body down with, yes, sir."

"Before this, F.W.—"

"Sewa—"

"—you brought her puppy into the kitchen."

"Yes, sir."

"Writhing on a prong of the fork."

"Pitchfork. But the reason I used buckshot on my cows is because to train 'em. So's they won't keep strayin' over outta the field. It don't take 'em long to learn to cut down my fencin' costs."

Seward felt wrung, the way trying to talk always did make him feel. "It may be just is that I ain't never liked the sight of fences much."

The doctor from the German university went on and on, sometimes saying words you couldn't for the life of you make out. Other times, the doctor would stand up, walk over to the barred window—maybe to show he wasn't afraid to turn his back?

He didn't need to worry hisself—he wasn't my wife.

And my wife wasn't stuck up like that neither. Can say one thing for her, she never put on airs and acted high and mighty, Lord no.

Maybe if she hadn't hit me on the cuts I'd gotten on my hand foolin' round with the doggoned tractor—oh, I'd take this off most anyone else, I reckon, but not off the person I spent my whole life looking for. And hadn't really never found, I suddenly knew.

It was just all of a sudden, and I went outta the kitchen. I stood in the hall waiting for her to come after me. And I said to myself, since the sun was settin', and there was a swatch of light on the floor with what looked like pale gray ants floatin' in it, I said to myself: Seward, if by the time that light does move off your foot, if by then she ain't come to you, she is dead.

Ants'll run in something dead if you leave it out long enough. But them kind ain't no-color ants. They're bright and livin'.

So, Seward sometimes sought at these that he killed. It was just—well, just looking. What is it like to be dead? What is the meaning of—of this-all?

Seward remembered the puppy most. His wife was all the time loving it. She called it cute baby names, lisping and cuddling it to her like

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if she was 'bout to nurse it for real. Made Seward right sick.

The doctor from the German university was saying something, but Seward had trouble, real true trouble, listening. It all sounded somehow like the little noise of "How are you?—I am fine," that people all the time say to each other.

"Do you like music, F.W.?"

"Beg pardon, sir?"

"Music. Do you—"

"Oh, no, sir."

"None at all?"

The doctor sounded like you ought to like music or else you're a lunatic for sure, so Seward said, "Well, my mother had a radio. I think what she liked was 'Black-bottom.' Or 'bout like that. But the radio got smashed."

Seward's father smashed it, because Seward's mother forgot to feed his hound dog.

"Black-what?" the doctor was asking, but Seward didn't want to talk any more, please.

"What he is doing is called 'psy-co-anal-isis'," the cop of the Juicy Fruit chewing gum had kindly replied to Seward's aching bewilderment. "Or somethin' like that, no less."

Seward was not sure what-all that might be, and it didn't matter enough for the pain of speech. He just knew one thing: he was going to die right soon, and he didn't want to go sloppy-like to the end.

The cop gave Seward a stick of gum, and Seward was mighty grateful, but felt right embarrassed by having nothing to offer him back.

The cop wasn't like those other folks, that'd been in the courtroom, yelling right out at Seward. Seward had kept still, head up, but not sassy at their yell: "Hanging's too good for him!"

On account of his having hurt animals.

Seems they were members of that Society they've got for Prevention of Cruelty to anything but humans.

Seward would've liked to keep the cop's gum to ease him and stop his throat from drying out so with the doctor. But it's bad manners to chew like that in front of folks.

The cop said he maybe could get Seward a radio, but Seward said, no, thank you kindly.

No, not music, but if only you could get me the dark blue mornings. But things like that, you don't never tell nobody. They are yours, and yours alone, secret and magical-like and—alone.

The doctor from the German university asked Seward what he read.

"Why—why, maybe once in a while the papers."

"Papers?"

"The newspapers, sir. Mostly the funnies. Funnies are the little bright pictures."

"No books, F.W.?"

"Well, I—" Seward looked to-

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ward his shoes which he wished were either on the field again or soles up. "The Sears and Roebuck Catalogue and—and like that. It's a store."

"You play no musical instrument, F.W.?"

"No, sir. I ain't never played or nothin' like that. Had to work all my life. I don't take no time off from my land. I'm a good farmer, if I do say so myself. I think my neighbors'd say that much for me, leastwise. Doctor—"

Seward did not hear the doctor interrupting him. "Now, now, let us not have any of this evasive chatter, F.W."

"—it do take a bit of brains to farm. I mean, maybe there's different kind of brains and their people. There's brains for playin' and brains for workin'. The last's me."

Seward's throat felt like if it was growing scratchy whiskers inside. Just words words *words!* He was having a hard time keeping his eyes open. These days and nights, he seemed to himself asleep—awake and awake—asleep. Like if night's the same as day.

The doctor kept harping on the pitchfork. And on the little puppy that was on it wriggling.

Seward's father had long ago talked to his hound dog like Seward's wife to that puppy. Land of goshen, how Pa had loved that hound dog!

When Seward had been trying to to fix the shack's roof, and fell and broke his leg, his father had fussed and hollered 'bout how much it would cost to fix that leg, said he'd fix it hisself, and started pullin' on it something terrible, and shoutin', "F.W.! F.W. you damn no-count—if you wasn't so dumb, just plain dumb . . ."

So Seward had decided then and there not to ever cry. Crying makes you look sloppy.

Seward's leg had been a mite crooked since that day, but not so bum that he couldn't run fetch the veterinarian for the hound dog.

One day Seward had got hold of that dog, petted it careful-like, then buried it alive.

Darned if Pa didn't nearly go mad, runnin' round like a chicken with its head cut off, here, there, everywhere, when I done told him to hurry up and try to find out where, 'fore it died of no air.

And I said to Pa, I said, "I'll keep tellin' you when you're gettin' hot and when you're gettin' cold. A regular treasure hunt, I declare!"

So then Pa did try to kill me. He was like that, though. It was just his nature, and, really, all in all, I didn't too much mind him— he was big and strong and right good to look at. And you won't never catch me complaining.

We always stuck together, him and me and Ma, any time any stranger come round trying to poke his nose into our business. You let 'em do that and you finish up lookin' sloppy.

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So the crooked leg was in those there doctor-papers too, but just only straight off about falling on account of the roof he'd been trying to fix for his family.

The doctor had looked sharp through his rimless eyeglasses at Seward to make Seward think he knew something. And all that malarky. But Seward tried to answer intelligent-like so's not to bore him stiff. This here doctor had real ele-gant careful manners, always rememberin' to make like he was leanin' his chin on his hand when he leaned his mouth to yawn.

Though it wasn't of no interest to folks, Seward had once upon a time thought how maybe he could get it all off his chest when he found himself a good wife some day. And so he'd run away, followed the sea instead of the land for a number of years—gotten himself a tattoo on the back of his right hand, so that now he kept it palm up, seeing from the doctor's eyes that it wasn't the right thing, exactly, this blue eagle. Seward had thought it looked proud, but maybe it didn't really.

Seward had come back from the sea, having found nothing there but water. He settled down on the farm he made payments on till it was his very own. And then, one day, a wife.

She'd had him hauled into court for cruelty. Not to her—oh, no, never, but to animals. He'd tried to reason with her, to tell her he didn't never hunt or fish like other fellows do, but that just off and on, he had to—well, sort of loosen up a bit.

"Loosen up what!" she yelled.

"Just—just somethin'. I don't know—somethin' *in* me."

But she kept shouting and stomping around, and he was scared with everything tightening up in him, so he went on out to the barn.

Couldn't talk *with* her, like he thought and dreamed he was going to be able to, the day he'd asked for her hand. It ain't just the hand you ask for.

But she didn't help him nowise to figger out how and what to say. Maybe later, maybe some day.

He'd prayed it'd be at night, after loving, when you lie tuckered out side by side, touching close—this should be like dark blue morning, only now together; like what's pretty to look at but can't be put rightly into words, dark blue and all. But she would fall to sleep right off. She wasn't like her hair, all gold and light and shining. Seward would hear her snoring, and look towards the window.

Oftentimes, he'd get up, go out for a smoke, maybe go through a whole pack of smokes. Something like when it's your turn to stand watch on a ship at sea, only then sometimes you have to hide your smokes, make like if there's no light there. And listen for the bells—time is bells for the sea. He didn't mind the bells so much, the way they have of sounding, even if they did mean getting up for the cold.

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One time, on the land that his house and marriage bed was on, one time in the night's moon, he saw a chicken snake once. "Probably for my chickens, eh, you damn no-count," Seward had chuckled soft. "If you wasn't so dumb, just plain dumb . . ."

And he caught the snake and put his cigarettes out on it, holding it and smoking.

A snake can't as much feel, I don't think, really.

"F.W. F.W. But why your parents give you no first name?" the doctor from the German university kept on asking, like if it was real strange.

That time in the daylight, when his wife had seen him fooling with a blacksnake, she had just only laughed, though staying a way off.

"You come here, lady," Seward said soft, "and take care of this here poor creature like you do your puppy."

Then she started running. Fast.

Seward ran after her, and caught her, too. He held the snake in one hand, her in the other, only her, gentle-like. And he bent his head, frowning blind at the earth, because he wanted this time, for once in his life, to say just the right words,

Her and the snake was writhing, the both. Seward felt only the snake, because it was in real terrible pain, from the look of it.

So Seward said, "You listen to me, you don't love this here snake like you love that puppy, just because this poor snake don't please you. So you don't really *love* that puppy neither! Because if you did *really* love that puppy, you would love this snake. And that's a fact, yes, ma'am!"

"You—you're crazy F.W. Let me go!"

"No, ma'am, I ain't crazy, no, ma'am. I am truthful! But you—you're the liar, yes, lady. You're a liar about—about life!"

"What did you do afterwards, F.W.?"

"After what, sir?"

"Why, after you—"

"Oh, that. Well, I went out in the hall, on out of the house, and fed the chickens. Then I sat a spell on the verandah."

"You started worrying?"

"Yes, sir. See, she'd gained a lot of weight by now. She must of been close to two hundred pounds. I wasn't altogether sure I could make it. Also the matter of the plow points. I didn't want to use the brand-new ones. So that meant I had to change the points to get the old ones."

"To weight her body down when you threw her in the river, F.W.?"

"To weight her body down when I threw her in the river," Seward said, so that he could die.

They turned the light off.

Morning.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **DONALD E. WESTLAKE**

TITLE: ***Just the Lady We're Looking For***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Being a housewife in a suburban development is not just shopping, cleaning, and cooking—not when men like Mr. Merriweather ring the front doorbell . . .*

THAT MORNING MARY CLEANED the kitchen, and after lunch she went shopping. It was a beautiful sunny day, but getting hot; the lawns and curbs and ranch-style houses of Pleasant Park Estates gleamed and sparkled in the sunlight, and in the distance the blacktop street shone like glittering water.

Mary had lived here barely five weeks now, but one development was very like another, and in her seven years of marriage to Geoff she'd seen plenty of them. Geoff transferred frequently, spending six months here, eight months there, never as much as a year in any one location. It was a gypsyish life, but Mary didn't mind: we're just part of the new mobile generation, she told herself, and let it go at that.

All the stores in the shopping center were air-conditioned, but that only made it worse when Mary finally walked back across the griddle of a parking lot to the car. She thought of poor Geoff, working outdoors 'way over at Rolling Rancheros, and she vowed to make him an extra-special dinner tonight: London broil, a huge green salad, and iced coffee. In fact, she'd make up a big pot of iced coffee as soon as she got home.

But she didn't get the chance. She'd barely finished putting the groceries away when the front doorbell sounded. She went to the living room, opened the door, and the man smiled, made a small bow, and said, "Mrs. Peters?"

He was about forty, very distinguished-looking, with a tiny Errol

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Flynn mustache and faint traces of gray at his temples. His dark suit fitted perfectly, and his black attaché case gleamed of expensive leather. He said, "I wonder if you could spare five minutes, or should I call back later?"

Mary frowned. "I'm sorry," she said, "I don't under—"

"Oh! You think I'm a salesman!" He laughed, but as though the joke were on himself, not on Mary. "I should have shown you my identification," he said, and from his inside coat pocket took a long flat wallet of black leather. From it he plucked a card, and extended it to Mary, saying, "Merriweather. Universal Electric."

The card was in laminated plastic, the printing in two colors. There was a photo of Mr. Merriweather, full face, and his signature underneath. The reverse side gave the office locations of Universal Electric in major cities.

Mr. Merriweather said, smiling, "You *have* heard of Universal Electric, I hope."

"Oh, of course. I've seen your ads on television."

Mr. Merriweather accepted his card back. "If you don't have time now—"

"Oh, I have time. Come on in."

"Thank you." He wiped his feet on the mat, and entered. "What a lovely home!"

"Oh, not really. We just moved in last month and it's still an awful mess."

"Not at all, not at all! You have charming taste."

They sat down, Mary in the armchair and Mr. Merriweather on the sofa, his attaché case beside him. He said, "May I ask what make of refrigerator you now have in your home?"

"It's a Universal."

"Wonderful." He smiled again. "And how old is it?"

"I really don't know—it came with the house."

"I see. And a home freezer unit, do you have one of those?"

"No, I don't."

"Well, fine. You may be just the lady we're looking for." Taking his attaché case onto his lap, he opened it and began removing brightly colored sheets of glossy paper. "A part of our advertising campaign for—"

Now she was sure. "Excuse me," she said, and got to her feet. Trying to smile normally and naturally, she said, "My groceries. I just got home from the store and nothing's put away yet. Your talking about the refrigerator reminded me."

"If you'd prefer that I come back la—"

"Oh, no." No, she didn't want to frighten him away. "This won't take a minute," she assured him. "I'll just put the perishables away, and I'll be right back."

He got to his feet and smiled and bowed as she left the room.

Her heart was pounding furiously and her legs didn't seem to want to

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work right. In the kitchen she went straight to the wall phone and dialed Operator, her hand trembling as she held the receiver to her ear. When the operator came on, Mary said, keeping her voice low, "I want the police, please. Hurry!"

It seemed to take forever, but finally a gruff male voice spoke, and Mary said, "My name is Mrs. Mary Peters, two-twelve Magnolia Court, Pleasant Park Estates. There's a confidence man in my house."

"A what?"

Didn't this policeman watch television? "A confidence man," she said. "He's trying to get money from me under false pretenses. I'll try to keep him here until you send somebody, but you'll have to hurry."

"In five minutes," the policeman promised.

Mary hung up, wishing there was some way to call Geoff. Well, she'd just have to handle it herself. Generally speaking, confidence men avoided violence whenever they could, so she probably wasn't in any direct physical danger; but you could never be sure. This one might be wanted for other more serious crimes as well, and in that case he might be very dangerous indeed.

Well, she'd started it, so she might as well see it through to the end. She took a deep breath, and went back to the living room.

Mr. Merriweather rose again, polite as ever. He now had the coffee table completely covered with glossy sheets of paper. She said, "I'm sorry I took so long, but I didn't want any of the food to spoil."

"Perfectly all right." He settled himself on the sofa again and said, "As I was saying, Universal Electric is about to introduce a revolutionary new type of refrigerator-freezer, with an advertising campaign built around the concept of the satisfied user. We are placing this refrigerator-freezer in specially selected homes for a six-months' trial period, absolutely free, asking only that the housewife, *if* she loves this new product as much as we are convinced she will, give us an endorsement at the end of that time and permit us to use her statement and name and photograph in our advertising, both in magazines and on television."

What would a housewife say who hadn't seen through this fraud? Mary strove for a suitably astonished expression and said, "And you picked me?"

"Yes, we did. Now, here—" he pointed to one of the papers on the coffee table "—is the product. On the outside it looks like an ordinary refrigerator, but—"

"But how did you happen to pick me?" She knew it was a dangerous question to ask, but she couldn't resist seeing how he would handle it. Besides, if she acted sufficiently naive, there wouldn't be any reason for him to get suspicious.

He smiled again, not at all suspicious, and said, "Actually, *I* didn't pick you, Mrs. Peters. The names

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were chosen by an electronic computer at our home office. We are trying for a statistical cross-section of America."

It was time to leave that, and become gullibly enthusiastic. She said, "And you really want to *give* me a refrigerator for six months?"

"Six months is the trial period. After that, you can either keep the unit in payment for your endorsement, or return it and take cash instead."

"Well, it sounds absolutely fantastic! A brand-new refrigerator for nothing at all."

"I assure you, Mrs. Peters," he said, smiling, "we don't expect to lose on this proposition. Advertising based on satisfied customers is far more effective than any other sort of campaign." He flipped open a notebook. "May I put you down as willing?"

"Yes, of course. Who wouldn't be willing?" *And where in the world were the police?*

He started to write, then suddenly cried, "Oh!" and looked stricken. "I'm so sorry, there's something I forgot, something I should have told you before. As I explained, you have the option either to keep the unit or return it. Now, we want to be sure our trial users won't harm the units in any way, so we do request a small damage deposit before delivery. The deposit is automatically refunded after the six months, unless you wish to return the unit and we find that it has been mistreated."

Would the unsuspicious housewife become suspicious at this point? Mary wasn't sure. But if she seemed *too* gullible, that might be just as bad as seeming too wary. So she said, guardedly, "I see."

"I'll give you a receipt for the deposit now," he went on glibly, "and you show it when the unit is delivered. It's just as simple as that."

"How much is this damage deposit?"

"Ten dollars." He smiled, saying, "You can see it's merely an expression of good faith on your part. If the unit *is* mistreated, ten dollars will hardly cover its repair."

"I'm not sure," she said doubtfully. She *had* to act more wary now, if only to stall until the police got here. "Maybe I ought to talk it over with my husband first."

"Certainly. Could you phone him at work? I do have to have your answer today. If you elect not to take the unit, I'll have to contact our second choice in this area."

"No, my husband works outdoors. I wish I *could* phone him." There was nothing to do now but pay him the money and pray that the police would arrive in time. "All right," she said. "I'll do it."

"Fine!"

"I'll just get my purse."

Mary went back to the kitchen and looked longingly at the telephone. Call the police again? No, they were surely on the way by

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now. She got her purse and returned to the living room.

It seemed to take no time at all to give him the money and get the receipt. Then he was rising, saying, "The unit should be delivered within three weeks."

Desperately, she said, "Wouldn't you like a glass of iced coffee before you go? It's so hot out today."

He was moving toward the door. "Thank you, but I'd better be getting back to the office. There's still—"

The doorbell chimed.

Mary opened the door, and Mr. Merriweather walked into the arms of two uniformed policemen.

The next five minutes were hectic. Merriweather blustered and bluffed, but the policemen would have none of it. When Mary told them his line, they recognized it at once: complaints had been coming in from swindled housewives in the area for over a month. "There's always a couple of these short-con artists working the suburbs," one of the policemen said.

But Mr. Merriweather didn't give up until one of the policemen suggested that they phone the local office of Universal Electric and verify his identification. At that, he collapsed like a deflated balloon. Turning to Mary, he said, "How? How did you know?"

"Women's intuition," she told him. "You just didn't seem right to me."

"That's impossible," he said. "What did I do wrong? How did you tumble to it?"

"Just women's intuition," she said.

The policemen took him away, shaking his head, and Mary went back to the kitchen and got started on dinner. She could hardly wait for Geoff to get home—to tell him about her day.

Geoff came in a little after five, his suit and white shirt limp and wrinkled. "What a scorcher," he said. "If it keeps up like this, we'd better move north again."

He pulled a handful of bills from his pockets, fives and tens, and dumped them on the dining-room table. As he counted them, he said, "How was your day?"

"Got rid of some of the competition," she told him. "Guy working the Free Home Demonstration dodge. Get that grift off the table, I have to set it for dinner."

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There are certain traditional gambits which we always find appealing. For example: two characters meet at a bar, or on a train, or in a club, and entirely through their dialogue we see the full story unfold—the past, the present, and sometimes the future.

Case in point: meet the Professor and the Physician, playing chess before a glowing, crackling log fire, fortifying themselves with wine and tobacco—and hear the whole story, past, present, and future . . .

This is the first publication of "End Game" in the United States.

END GAME

by POLLY PODOLSKY

THE PROFESSOR'S DEEP BLUE EYES were steadily fixed on his guest. The Physician, younger of the two, stubbed his cigarette among a pile of twisted butts in the ashtray. His hand hovered like a hawk, then swooped down to move a black pawn one square.

"*Gardez!*"

"Ah!" sighed the Professor. "My queen . . . Bold move, my friend—as usual."

The Physician's face was averted —toward the third unoccupied chair; his brown eyes shifted to the piano, then back to the chess.

"So you miss Elizabeth, too," murmured the Professor as he carefully placed his queen out of the aggressive pawn's reach.

The Physician did not reply. With chin cupped he studied the board.

The Professor grinned boyishly, raised his shoulders to adjust his smoking jacket, and fitted his big body comfortably into the padded tapestry of the chair. "Tch! Such concentration . . ."

With sudden decision the Physician moved his black king one square toward the center of the board. He looked up.

"I beg your pardon. You were saying?"

"Oh, nothing. I had just forgotten how seriously you play. When you want something you really go after it. Eh?"

The Physician smiled. "I wouldn't say that . . ."

"Then why do I lose to you so often?" interposed the Professor quickly.

"Luck," said the Physician smoothly.

"Bah!" laughed the Professor as he pulled a browned meerschaum from his sagging pocket. He nibbled pensively on the stem. As an after-

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thought, "Unless my bad moves are your luck."

"To admit that," smiled the Physician, "would negate my skill. Let us say winning is a habit with some of us." The smile left his face, the thin mouth hardened. "It's almost a compulsion when you've had to claw your way—from the beginning. Hard for you to understand, no doubt, with all this—"

He waved his hand to encircle the room with its carpet, massive bookcases, its *objets d'art* carelessly scattered. He caught his lip with his teeth, as if in fierce restraint.

The Professor's cherubic expression faded as his eyes narrowed. "You are wrong, my friend. Dead wrong. I do understand—more than you think." He paused as if carefully weighing the next words. "You know the joy of winning. I—I know the agony of losing. That's the difference—you start with nothing and win, I start with everything and lose. I'd give you—or anyone—" he added hastily, "everything I own for the one possession I have lost. But it's impossible. I'm foolish."

The Professor smiled sadly and fingered his white queen. "But you are not going to win tonight—I promise." He moved the queen. "Check!"

They played in silence, a silence marked off by the ticking clock with its old unconcerned face. They exchanged piece for piece, a bishop for a bishop, a knight for a knight, a rook for a rook. Finally they were reduced to kings, queens, and pawns, but the Physician was ahead one pawn.

"A little pawn," muttered the Professor. "A little pawn, who might grow up to be a mighty queen. I must be careful." He stood up to stretch his large body. "Let's stop a while. We'll continue later. A glass of wine?"

Without waiting he moved easily in slippered feet through the high pile of the carpet. From a decanter on the Sheraton cabinet he poured two glasses of port. "Not the oldest, but good vintage . . ."

"Thank you," said the Physician.

"What shall we drink to?" asked the Professor, holding his glass to the light. "To Elizabeth?"

The Physician focused his gaze on the chessmen, as though photographing them in his memory, then settled back. "Yes, to Elizabeth." He raised his glass. "By the way, where is Elizabeth?"

The Professor stared at the Physician, his brows drawn. "Don't you know?" he asked softly.

"Know what?"

"Elizabeth has left me," said the Professor flatly.

The Physician started, but almost instantly regained composure. Straightening the knot of his tie, he observed his friend's pained expression with steady brown eyes. "I'm sorry . . ."

"Sorry?" said the Professor and

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laughed drily. "Yes. It might be more than you bargained for."

"I had no idea."

"Didn't you? I thought usually the husband was the last . . ."

"But she will be back?" ventured the Physician.

"I am not sure of that," responded the Professor. "You see—" leaning forward as if to reveal a secret—"there may be—there *is* another man." He paused to watch the effect of his words. Then his mobile face seemed to relax. "Drink up!"

They raised their glasses. The clock ticked on dispassionately.

The Physician was the first to break the silence. "What makes you think . . . perhaps I should not ask who the man is . . ."

For a long moment the Professor did not answer; his eyes watched the wine glass as he twirled it slowly. "'Man' did you say?" The Professor laughed. "'Skunk' would be more appropriate. A friend he called himself, and all the time—"

"But are you sure? Do I know . . ."

"Of course you know him," the Professor chuckled. "As for being sure—well, let's call it an educated guess. But I mean to be sure—dead sure—because . . ."

The Professor paused, his eyes very blue. The words came dry, matter-of-fact. "I intend to kill him."

"What!" cried the Physician. "You cannot mean what you are saying! You are not yourself. You —you—" He leaned toward the Professor, examining his face with professional interest. The Physician's face was pale, taut. A muscle twitched on his high cheekbone; then slowly the expression softened, the thin lips smiled.

"You had me worried for a moment." He pushed the sleek black lock from his forehead. "You *are* joking, aren't you?"

The Professor shook his head. "No."

"But seriously now—" the other continued earnestly, "—there are many interpretations of a woman's behavior—especially a woman like Elizabeth."

"And who could possibly interpret her behavior better than I?" interrupted the Professor.

"Yes, yes. But supposing, just for the sake of sane reasoning, supposing it is so—then what? What could you gain by this—this foolish threat to kill the man? Revenge? Come now, what good would that do? Only *you* would pay the consequences—"

"No jury would convict me—at worst, prison for a time, maybe. It would be well worth the price. But wait, you are putting words in my mouth. You say 'revenge'—you misjudge me."

"Then what?"

"Elizabeth—I must protect her. This man could not make her happy. He only wanted the conquest—you

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know, one of those men we talked about—one who must win."

"So you have to play God Almighty and save Elizabeth from a fate worse than death!" The Physician laughed. "That is known as melodrama in the theater."

"Call it what you like," snapped the Professor. "Oh, excuse me—I am sure you mean well."

"It occurs to me," said the Physician, "that there is still another possibility. Don't you think you may be imagining . . ."

Vehemently the Professor interrupted, "No!"

"But you have been a pretty sick man," persisted the Physician, "and delusions are not uncommon, nothing to be ashamed of, you know."

"Ha! So now I am mad. Put me in the loony bin and save me from myself, eh? That's really big of you and, of course, so convenient. Not a chance. You'd need Elizabeth to certify me."

"Well, if you carry on so—so insanely—maybe she would."

The Professor's eyes widened as if he had been struck. "She wouldn't—she couldn't . . ."

"Of course, she wouldn't. But you must pull yourself together and try to separate delusion from fact."

"But I am not having delusions—I wish to God I were."

"Yes, yes, of course," agreed the Physician readily. "What I really want to say, speaking as a medical man, is that there may be a very simple and obvious explanation."

"That there is," said the Professor drily.

The Physician went on, "Elizabeth is probably worn out, as the result of your recent illness. She was, as you must admit, a most conscientious and devoted nurse."

The Professor's eyes did not leave the Physician's face. Leaning forward he spoke emphatically. "There you have it—the coronary thrombosis. Oh, you did a good job pulling me through. But—" he grimaced, "the restrictions! No alcohol, no excitement—and no wife. What a fool I was!"

"If you want to live—" began the Physician.

"Yes, I want to live—but not as a half-dead creature." Resolutely he stood up and took the wine glasses to the cabinet, where he filled them from the decanter. Hesitating a moment he took a *cloisonne* box from the mantelpiece.

The Physician watched him as he pushed the tobacco with a forefinger into the deep bowl of the pipe, then struck a match on the blackened recess above the glowing logs.

"Well," said the Physician, "I don't suppose one pipe now and then will kill you—but—"

Drawing deeply, his eyes half closed, the Professor savored the spicy aroma. "Bit dry."

"It's your life," shrugged the Physician. "Nothing more I can do, if you won't listen—"

"I've listened to you enough,"

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said the Professor tartly. "Now *you* listen." The Professor reseated himself. "You saw her frequently. Hadn't you noticed how she had changed? Even the way she dressed—"

"No, I can't say I did. Elizabeth always seemed happy."

"Yes, when you came to the house."

"—perhaps a trifle high strung," continued the Physician, ignoring the interruption. "Always well groomed, well dressed—that seemed natural for a woman like Elizabeth."

"That's right," agreed the Professor. "But what was not natural was that she started to dress again for dinner. It seemed to me she was dressing in anticipation, as though she were constantly expecting someone to drop in."

The Physician rubbed his knees with the palms of his widespread hands.

The Professor continued, "There was one evening when she wore a green dress. I had never seen her look so beautiful—her skin—her shoulders—so white, like new snow on a young spruce. That night I found her particularly desirable. How you must have envied me! You seemed so reluctant to go—to leave Elizabeth with me."

The Physician's eyes widened. He pushed himself away from the fragile table, upsetting the chessmen. One word left his lips like the hiss of steam, "Nonsense!"

The Professor laughed as he replaced the pieces, one by one, and went on, "I couldn't blame you—you are a man too—and she affected most men that way. Why deny it?"

The Physician inhaled deeply on his cigarette, then watched the smoke float lazily toward the Professor, whose sharp blue eyes crinkled in a smile.

"Certainly Elizabeth is attractive," said the Physician. "But that does not mean . . ." He broke off, as if embarrassed to enlarge.

The Professor continued, "That night she acted so strangely—I thought she was ill—her eyes . . ."

The Physician repressed a yawn on the back of his hand, as he glanced at the clock. "It's getting late—shall we get back to chess?"

"In good time. The evening is still young—very young. Am I boring you? I am sorry—but as my physician you have to listen. Who else can I talk to? You must help me decide."

The Physician said easily, "Gladly. But nothing you have said seems based on reality. Besides, I feel you are putting me in an undignified position."

"Dignity!" scoffed the Professor. "Ridiculous! You know as well as I that dignity is a cloak for small men. Without it they feel naked."

The Physician's face reddened. The large fingers found a cigarette. He said, "Now can't we be sensible and civilized? Your interpretations may well be the outcome of morbidity—your illness—"

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"You have already questioned my sanity—let's not go into that again," remarked the Professor drily. "As for reality—Elizabeth has left me, that's a fact. Everything points to another man—and why not? She is young, I am *hors de combat*—almost any man would have had an opportunity." He placed his cold pipe carefully in the large ashtray.

"You are a scientist," said the Physician. "You know that a good theory must agree with facts—it seems you don't have enough facts."

"Facts are experimentally verifiable phenomena—and that is precisely what I intend to do—verify!"

"That is not so simple. You are dealing with complex personalities, with human emotions. Anyway, how does Elizabeth herself explain your accusations?"

"Accusations? She does not know what I suspect. She said she must get away—anywhere—her nerves were in bad shape—on the verge of breakdown. How could I say 'no'?" The Professor paused to caress the arm of the vacant chair. "I followed her around while she packed—that green dress, snow boots, such absurd things—we bought them in Switzerland."

The Physician's eyes were bright. He smiled. "There—you have a simple explanation. Why seek further? Elizabeth's nerves *are* in bad shape. It's understandable; she's gone through an ordeal. Listen—why don't we persuade her to see a psychiatrist, while she is in New York? I can recommend an excellent man, a very good friend—"

He broke off suddenly, as his animated eyes met the staring eyes of the Professor.

The Professor's face paled. He labored to speak between shallow breaths. "In—New—York—did—you—say?" He breathed deeply. A pulse beat fast above the loose collar of his shirt. He stared beyond the padded shoulder of the Physician. "Ah!" he exhaled finally. He began to laugh, quietly, then louder, the flesh on his face shaking. "That was funny!" He wiped his eyes on the back of his hand.

The Physician watched him closely, hands clenched.

"Well," said the Professor, suddenly sober, "enough of that. Let's finish the game."

The Physician rose, glanced at the clock. "Sorry," he said, "I have an important engagement in the morning." He straightened his long back and brushed his shoulder with his fingertips.

"Then first, another drink—for the road—" insisted the Professor.

The Physician stood before the dying fire, his arms stretched before him.

A light switch clicked and glasses tinkled. The Physician spun around, alert. The Professor emerged from the adjoining room carrying a silver tray. The Physician locked and twisted his hands.

"Something special," the Professor was saying. "Oporto 1910."

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Carefully he placed a glass at the Physician's place. "Sit down, man, make yourself comfortable."

The Physician seated himself slowly, his eyes on the Professor, who sipped from his brimming glass before placing it on the table.

The Professor threw some logs on the glowing embers and raked the ashes to nurse a flame.

The Physician, watching the Professor's rounded back, wiped his brow with his handkerchief. Swiftly his hands shot forward—one to each glass. He sank back in his chair, white, breathing fast. The logs crackled and hissed and the flames cast waving shadows.

The Professor rubbed his hands as he returned to the table. A trickle of sweat glistened from his temple to his chin, like the trail of a snail. Scanning the table, he said. "We might as well finish—it won't take long. Your move, old chap." As he spoke he wiped away a drop of spilled wine with a flick of his finger.

The Physician seemed to consider his move.

"Drink your wine—it's superb," urged the Professor between sips.

The Physician raised his glass, his eyes on the board. He drank slowly. The clock ticked off the seconds of silence.

Finally the Professor spoke. "You may think I am an old fool, that no woman is worth so much—"

A vague smile softened the Physician's mouth. He toyed with his empty glass.

The Professor wearily drained his own glass and continued, "But without her, life is meaningless. I could not let you take her from me—" He paused.

The Physician said quietly, "How did you know?"

"Simple," said the Professor. "You gave yourself away. You said 'New York.' I was wondering why she took snow boots to Florida."

The Physician started, but recovered, "No matter now. So you thought you'd get rid of me?"

"Yes," answered the Professor, gazing at his empty glass. "Slow-acting and—no antidote." The Professor cupped his chin and examined the chess board. He said, pondering, "My move, I believe."

The Physician grinned astringently. "No," he said. "You have already made your last move—and lost—everything." He stopped to chain-light a cigarette quivering between compressed lips.

"So?" The Professor raised his brows.

"Yes," said the Physician. "I switched the drinks."

"Clever," murmured the Professor. "But, on second thought, a bit silly. How will you explain it?"

"Very easy," smiled the Physician. "I shall sign your death certificate—coronary failure. Not so silly, you see. But Elizabeth was stupid—she should have told me about Florida."

"Elizabeth is not stupid," retorted the Professor. "Perhaps she

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is not astute—otherwise she'd have seen through a complete charlatan like you."

"Your taunting does not matter any more," said the Physician. "Face it—Elizabeth is in love with *me!* We arranged to meet in New York." His fingers dug deep into the brocade of the vacant chair. The Professor was silent; he picked on the inlay of the table.

The Physician continued, his dark eyes shining, his face alive, "When she played the piano it was for *me!* For me, do you understand? Each time I beat you at chess, it was like winning her all over again!"

"You cheap trash—you cheap upstart—"

"Yes, the upstart. But I took her from you—the possession you valued most. You and your conspicuous intellect, your superior airs, your pose of a connoisseur—"

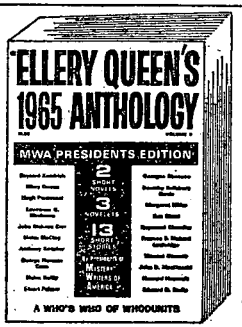
"Yes, yes, I can guess all that," interrupted the Professor impatiently. "I have understood you from the beginning. But tell me one thing," he said softly. "Beyond the satisfaction of winning, of what value is Elizabeth to you?"

The Physician waved his hand airily, "She flatters me, she amuses me. For the present I find her delightful—"

"For the present? And the future?"

"Who knows?" said the Physician with a shrug.

"Perhaps I do," said the Professor, gently picking up the white queen. "You see—" he spoke very slowly, very quietly—"both drinks were poisoned . . ."



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Nearly everyone—the police, the courts (the Old Bailey and the Court of Appeal), the people at large—nearly everyone was convinced that Harry Gordon was a cold-blooded killer, that he had murdered a famous actress. Yet Harry Gordon had friends—unknown friends in peculiarly "high" places, "all happy to work in the cause of justice" . . . A fascinating short novel of police-cum-legal procedure, packed with suspense and a feeling of dangerous, last-minute Snarklike moves and desperate counter-moves . . .

STAY OF EXECUTION

by MICHAEL GILBERT

NUMBER ONE COURT AT THE OLD Bailey was full. And yet at that solemn moment there seemed to be only two people there.

The presiding Judge wore long-sleeved, full-skirted red robes, and a grizzled wig. A deep cleft started from the corner of each nostril, ran out at an angle, and then dropped, so that his mouth lay between goal posts.

Over against him, separated by the well of the court, Harry Gordon stood in the dock. He looked baffled. Not fearful, but dumb, and worried, as a man may look when the forces of the world conspire to bludgeon him.

At seventy, Mr. Justice Enright was too old to welcome change. So he signaled to the hovering Chaplain to place the black square of silk on his wig. This was optional, but he thought it added an extra solemnity to the moment. He would have preferred the old words, too, now denied to him.

"That you be taken from this place to a lawful prison and thence to a place of execution and that you suffer death by hanging—"

They were terrible words. But not inappropriate, he thought, for a man found guilty of a horrible crime—a man who had attempted, repeatedly, to seduce a girl, and failing, had shot her, later trying to dispose of body and weapon.

"The sentence of this court," he said, "is that you shall suffer death, in a manner authorized by law."

On the word, the reporters, who had worked their way close to the swing doors, jumped through them

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and clattered down the passage to the row of telephone booths. Receivers were off the hook, and their voices were breathing into the mouthpieces, before Harry Gordon had left the dock.

Sentence on Highgate Killer said the posters in blood-red, which matched Mr. Justice Enright's robes. *Death* they said. And again, and again —*Death*. The old beast of capital punishment had opened its mouth once more. It had breathed fire from its throat. A man was to be put to death. People could no longer watch it, but they could think about it, they could imagine it, as they made their way home, that evening, to their snug villas and their semi-detached existences.

A few cranks would protest, but not the snug, semi-detached ones. No, no. To them the sentence was right and fitting. Harry Gordon was a cold-blooded killer. In a few weeks he, too, would die.

To Harry Gordon himself, the realization had come slowly; not in one piece, but in several pieces. He was living two lives at once. One in the present, in a brick-walled, steel-barred room in Pentonville Prison; the other in the past.

Sometimes it was the distant past. Childhood, with dimly remembered, conventional, middle-class parents; left-wing friends at London University; his short and undistinguished career as a National Service man. The resolve, taken on the top of a bus going west down Kings Road, Chelsea, to become an architect. The fight to qualify, the anti-climax when he had qualified and could get no work.

Then the day he had met Janine.

Like a camera tracking suddenly into a close-up, his mind focused on Janine.

He could remember every detail of the meeting.

In his wanderings round North London he had spotted a tumble-down box of bricks called Sandpit Cottage. His architect's eye had seen possibilities in it, as living quarters, office, and studio. He had got hold of the details from the agent, and had hurried down to talk to his solicitor, Mr. Beeding, at his office in New Square.

While he was in the waiting room, Mr. Henry, the old litigation clerk, had poked his head round the door and said, in his rich, comedian's voice, "Come along, come along. You can make yourself useful, Mr. Gordon. There's a signature to be witnessed."

Janine was sitting in a chair beside Mr. Beeding's desk, pen poised.

"Can I start now?" she said. As soon as she spoke, he had recognized her. He had seen her in two plays and half a dozen films. He watched, fascinated, as she wrote her name *Janine Mann*. So that was her real name, as well as her stage name. He and Mr. Henry witnessed the signature. Mr. Beeding introduced him.

"A rising young architect."

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"Not true," he had said. "Planning to rise if you like, but I have not yet left the runway."

"A lot of people I know," she had given a sideways glance at Mr. Beeding as she spoke, "would be glad to be safe back on the runway."

And that was the beginning of it. How long had it been, after that, before she was first in his arms?

She was ten years older than he was. Away from footlights and camera and make-up artists, she was not particularly beautiful. It was her body which had fascinated him. Like all actresses, models, and courtesans, she was conscious of it, but never self-conscious about it, that extraordinary putting together of flesh and muscle and skin and bone which made her a woman in a thousand.

"I am an architect," he had told her, stroking her bare shoulder. "And I know that what pleases the eye is proportion—and the proper assembly of parts into a whole." And she had laughed at him.

She was always laughing at him. He sometimes wondered why she bothered with him at all. He had no money, and money was one of her preoccupations. She had not been in a big film or a successful play for some time, and he guessed that, like most stage folk, she was finding it hard to pay the tax on the years of success. Probably that accounted for her frequent visits to Mr. Beeding.

Maybe it was his youth, and his intolerance, that she found refreshing. She liked talking. She would spend long afternoons lying on a sofa in his drawing office (Sandpit Cottage had turned out to be all he hoped); she would talk about life, about plays (with plenty of detail), about men (but with less detail), about religion and politics, hope and fear, life and death.

She had never given him anything. Not her money, nor her body—that sensuous, sensitive body, an artist's pleasure, a sculptor's delight, thrown down like a discarded toy on his shabby sofa; not even when, one afternoon, provoked beyond enduring, he had tried to take it by force, and she had astonished him with the strength in her thin wrists.

But though she would give him nothing, she had borrowed something. Once.

The camera jerked forward again.

She had arrived unusually late, out of the murk and the drizzle of a November night. It must have been nearly eight o'clock when he heard her red Aston-Martin draw up, with the distinctive squeal of its unadjusted brakes, in the courtyard behind his house.

The moment she came in, he saw that she was frightened. He tried, for nearly an hour, to find out what was wrong. And all he had learned was that she was meeting a man, later on that evening, at his home, which she would get to by driving down the Great West Road, and that she was terrified of him.

The first part might have been

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true or untrue. She lied often, and easily. But of the second part there was no doubt. Her voice said it, her eyes said it, her hands said it.

All the same, he had been surprised at her request.

"I know you've got a revolver somewhere," she said. "You told me you brought one back from Germany. I want to borrow it."

"It's not a revolver," he said, playing for time. "It's an automatic. And it's a dangerous weapon."

"It's got a safety catch—something like that. You could show me how it works. I only want to frighten him."

"Frighten who?"

"I can't tell you."

"If you won't tell me, I won't lend you the gun."

But of course he had, first carefully removing every bullet from the magazine. And just before nine she had driven away. And five minutes later he had followed her.

He could pick her up easily enough, even on such a vile night. If she was going down the Great West Road, she would take the North Circular. She had the faster car, but he was the better driver. He picked up the Aston-Martin near Ealing, and fell in behind her.

He had no firm idea of what he wanted to do. It seemed unlikely that there was anything he could do. But he was infatuated with her. And she was going to meet another man. He had to be there.

At the road junction before London Airport he lost her. He got caught, for a moment, behind a block of airport traffic. She slipped through, and was gone.

It was the worst of all possible places for it to happen. She might have turned right, down the Slough Road, gone straight ahead, to Staines, or even forked left, through Hounslow.

With no clue to help him, he had chosen the middle road. After a couple of miles that, too, forked—left to Laleham and Chertsey, right to Staines.

It was the beginning of an hour of fruitless searching, casting round, questioning pedestrians who, hurrying home, their heads down against the driving rain, had seen no Aston-Martin and wouldn't have recognized one if they had—and good night to you.

At about half-past ten, he had stopped at a big roadhouse, drunk two double whiskies and eaten a sandwich in the crowded saloon bar. At midnight, with the rain easing up a little as the wind dropped, he had got back to Sandpit Cottage.

The red Aston-Martin was standing in the yard. Janine was on the back seat, crouching down, as though hiding from him. He knew she was dead before his hand felt the blood, caked but still sticky, on the front of her coat. His gun was on the floor of the car.

Why didn't I send for the police at once, he thought. While my car was still warm, and the mud on it

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was wet, and the roadhouse might still have had my whiskey glass, unwashed, with my fingerprints on it, and the girl who served me might still have remembered me, and one of the people I'd stopped—just one of them—might really have remembered it, if asked about it straight away.

Instead of which, his one idea had been to get rid of everything—body, gun, and car. Epping Forest seemed to him to be the best place. In the lonelier parts of the Forest a body might lie undiscovered for weeks or months; then drive the car back to within a mile or two of Highgate, and walk the rest of the way home. The gun could go down a drain. And the bullets, which he had so carefully removed from the magazine. He must take care not to be seen driving away from the house. He must wear gloves the whole time. He must not lose his head.

It might have worked, too, if, turning off the main road into the Forest, he hadn't bogged the low-slung Aston-Martin in a mud patch. And if, while accelerating desperately to get out of it, a police car had not slid up behind him, and a maddeningly polite voice inquired, "Can we help you, sir . . . ?"

That stout, competent, middle-aged solicitor Alfred Beeding, of Bailey & Beeding, drove down to Pentonville Prison in a taxi, with Hargest Macrea, Q.C., and Bridget Avery. Mr. Macrea had a long thin face, smiled rarely and enjoyed classical music and the wines of the Médoc. Bridget was pretty and normally laughed a good deal, but that morning she, too, sat under a black cloud.

The silence in the taxi was broken only once, by Macrea, who said suddenly, "If only it had been a fine night. When it's raining, people notice nothing, except their wet trouser legs."

Mr. Beeding nodded. It had been one of the most puzzling things about the case. Gordon swore that he had spoken to at least four pedestrians, but in spite of an appeal splashed in all the newspapers, only Mr. Keun had come forward, and he had been a most unsatisfactory witness, vague about times, uncertain about details, contradictory.

At the door of the interview room Mr. Beeding, noticing Bridget's white face, had said, "If you'd rather not come in, I could manage—"

"I'll be all right," she said in a shaky voice.

"It'll be a great help if you can get down everything he says. Don't worry about Macrea and me. But anything *he* lets drop. Anything at all. It might be useful."

It was a long interview, and Bridget's wrist was aching before it was finished. He talked too fast. It was as if he realized that there was a time limit for talking, as for everything else.

"Slow," she wanted to say. "Go slower. Stop for a moment, stop and

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think." But the words came faster and faster; repeating the story she had heard so many times before, picking it up, putting it down, wringing the last stale drop of fact out of it.

Mr. Beeding prodded with an occasional question, Macrea sat unmoving, and apparently unmoved.

It was when they rose to go that Harry Gordon looked at Bridget. He seemed to be noticing her for the first time, to be taking in her pleasant face, her white skin under her reddish hair.

She looked at him, too, and saw what lay behind his eyes. She saw that realization had begun to creep back into him, like feeling into a frozen limb. She saw that he was desperate and alone. And she hated herself, and everyone else, bitterly, for what they were doing to him.

"Do you think he's got a chance?" She asked the question as they were driving back, and it was Hargest Macrea who answered, in his dry Lowland voice.

"A lot depends," he said, "on who we get. Some of the younger Judges are not too happy about the Homicide Act. It won't affect their legal judgment, of course, but if we could get any new evidence—of any sort—I think they'd be happy to listen to it."

"How long have we got?"

"About three weeks . . ."

At the same moment, two very different men were talking about the case.

Chief Superintendent Lacey, who had a healthy red face and white hair cut very short, was the head of the C.I.D. in Number 3 District. Anderson, the man he was talking to, had the look of a barrister. He had, in fact, abandoned a career at the Bar to come to New Scotland Yard of which he was now the Assistant Commissioner in charge of the C.I.D.

"It was lucky for us," said Lacey, "that none of the three defense witnesses really stood up to cross-examination."

"No," said the Assistant Commissioner. "It doesn't mean, of course, that they weren't telling the truth—to the best of their ability."

"They may have been truthful. They were pretty muddled, though. And the old girl, I'd say, was definitely cracked."

"Yes." The Assistant Commissioner turned the pages of the report. There had been nothing wrong with the case. Harry Gordon had killed the girl. No doubt about it. And yet standing, as he did, a little further from the case than the Superintendent, he had a feeling—something too indefinite to be called doubt—a feeling of a loose end, somewhere, which needed tying up before the case could be docketed and put away.

He said, "The garage hand—Walters—was their best witness. He knew the girl's Aston-Martin well, and had serviced it that morning. He had noted the speedo reading on

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his own service log as 16733. When the car was found in Epping Forest, it showed 16814. Eighty-one miles. It isn't more than ten from Highgate to where Gordon was picked up. How do you account for that?"

"She could have driven it seventy miles that day herself."

"No one remembers her doing it."

"Or the garage hand got it wrong. He could easily have written '33' when it was really '83'. Easy to do."

"He might have. Garage hands aren't accountants. Then we have André Keun, formerly of Paris, now of Laleham, who says that he was walking home, in the rain, at about ten o'clock when a young man, who might have been the prisoner, driving a car which might have been an Austin, or might have been a Ford, stopped him and asked if he'd seen a red car. His English wasn't very good, was it?"

"I thought we'd have to bring in an interpreter, sir. Lucky we didn't have to. No one really likes interpreters."

"Finally, there was Miss Huckstep, of Muswell Hill, who was passing the north end of Highgate Wood, at a point where the cul-de-sac from Sandpit Cottage runs out into the main road, and saw a sinister man come out of the cul-de-sac, at exactly half-past eleven. How did she know it was half-past eleven? She heard the church clock strike. How did she know he was sinister? He reminded her of an uncle, a most unpleasant man. He had this same habit of swinging his rolled umbrella from side to side, behind his back—swishing it, as if it was a tail."

"She's quite a local character," said Lacey. "Always bothering the police to give evidence. They know her well down at the station."

"I see," said the Assistant Commissioner. With his barrister's eye he was picturing the three witnesses, estimating the effect they might have had on a jury. Walters: solid, but possibly mistaken. Keun: vague, and a foreigner. Miss Huckstep: if not mad, eccentric.

"It didn't carry a lot of weight against the sort of stuff we could produce," said Lacey. "Those letters—I'd hardly call them love letters. More threats than love. The bullet in the girl's body, fired from his own gun. No doubt about the ballistic evidence. The way he tried to get rid of the body."

"If he was guilty," said the Assistant Commissioner, "it was the only thing he could do. If he was innocent, it was the biggest mistake he ever made."

The words "if he was innocent" hung in the air, twisting round on themselves like cigarette smoke.

"*You* don't think he's innocent, do you, sir?"

"The thing I can't quite fit in," said the Assistant Commissioner, "is the bullets. You found eight of them in his handkerchief drawer, didn't you?"

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"That's right, sir."

"And the magazine holds nine."

"That's right."

"So to that extent, it fits in with his story. That he emptied the magazine, and forgot that there might be one up the spout. A lot of people who know more about guns than Gordon forget that every year."

"I agree, sir," said Lacey, "but—"

"If he shot her, can you think of any reason why he'd *then* empty the magazine into his handkerchief drawer?"

"To support his story, sir."

"He wasn't thinking about stories—not then. He was going to dump the body and throw the gun down a drain. Why not take the bullets with him—?"

The Superintendent shook his head. He wanted to say that there was no accounting for what murderers did. There was often no logic about it. They just lost their heads.

Instead, he said, "Do you think he'll appeal?"

"Certainly he'll appeal," said the Assistant Commissioner. "This is one sentence they can't increase."

Macrea knew, almost as soon as he rose, that the Court of Criminal appeal was against him.

Ranged on the bench, in the most attractive of the many curious Courts in the Royal Courts of Justice, Strand, the burly figure of the Lord Chief Justice looked down at him, flanked on the right by Mr. Justice Jerrold, and on the left by Mr. Justice Rymer.

"Couldn't have been a worse Court," said Macrea to himself. And aloud, "I should now like to draw your Lordships' attention to a passage in the summing up which, it seems to me, seriously misstates the position as to onus of proof."

The dock was much smaller than the one at the Old Bailey. Harry Gordon's white, tightly clenched face showed just above the edge of the woodwork, and below the iron rail which crowned it. Beside him, on his left, a warder sat on the edge of his chair and tried to take an interest.

Curiously, in this Court, the prisoner seemed much less important. He was a lay figure, propped up in one corner, while the legal argument occupied the center of the stage.

Admissibility of Evidence, Weight of Evidence, Onus of Proof.

They might, thought Bridget, from her seat on the solicitors' bench, have been talking about a bale of hay. Had any of them a single thought for the animal behind the bars?

It was apparent, when the Lord Chief Justice started to sum up in his deep voice, that he was trying his hardest to find some merit in the appeal. He was trying so hard that Macrea made a face, scribbled *Appeal dismissed* on a piece of paper, and handed it back to Mr. Beeding, who looked at it and nodded. Tiny drops

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of sweat were standing on his forehead. He was not as tough as Macrea.

On the floor below the Court, Mr. Arbuthnot, Q.C., who knew nothing at all of Harry Gordon and his affairs, chose this moment to enter the story.

Mr. Arbuthnot was engaged in the case which was due to come on next in the Court of Criminal Appeal. His client, a previously convicted receiver of stolen goods, was waiting, as he knew, in a small room at the foot of the winding stone stairs which lead up to the interior of the dock. He therefore knocked at the door which guarded the foot of the stairs, and peered through the thick glass spy-hole to see if one of the warders had heard him.

At this moment the Lord Chief Justice, swiveling his bulk round in his seat, and looking directly at the prisoner, had started a sentence with the words, "In all the circumstances, and having regard to every possible contention so ably put forward by Counsel on your behalf, this Court has come to the unanimous conclusion—" when Harry Gordon rose in his chair, hit the sitting warder very hard in the lower part of his stomach, and dived down the winding staircase.

At the foot of the stairs the second warder had the door open, and was explaining to Mr. Arbuthnot, Q.C., that the preceding case would very shortly be concluded.

He was right. Harry, taking the last three stairs with a jump, landed in the middle of his back. The warder fell forward on to his hands and knees, hitting his head against the door post.

Harry picked himself up, said, "Excuse me" to the astounded Mr. Arbuthnot, and disappeared in the direction of the Main Hall.

As he did so, an electric alarm bell began to ring . . .

"He did *what*?" said Chief Superintendent Lacey.

The telephone stuttered at him.

"Did you get the entrances sealed? Within thirty or forty seconds? A desperate man can go a long way in forty seconds. Yes, I'm sure you did your best."

In ten minutes Lacey was listening to the Superintendent of the Royal Courts of Justice, Mr. Breadwell.

"We have to cope with quite a few bad hats," said Breadwell. "Criminals, defaulters, lunatics, all sorts. And we've got quite an efficient alarm system. It's operated by a bell relay. As soon as it starts, Court officials and police officers close all the exits except the front door, and that's guarded. It should be effective inside sixty seconds."

Lacey considered the matter. He knew exactly where the Court of Appeal stood. There was a long passage from the point where Gordon had broken out to the Main Hall, and the Main Hall itself was over eighty yards long. Besides

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which, once in the Main Hall, a fugitive wouldn't want to attract attention to himself by running.

"I think you're right," he said. "He's still in the building."

He was right. Harry was still inside the building.

Seeing the officials spring into action at the main doors when the alarm sounded, he had veered off, up a spiral stairway which led off halfway down the left-hand side of the hall.

This took him up to the third floor, where he came out into a long, gloomy, but deserted passage. From two stories below, muffled by the thick walls and floors, the sounds of alarm and pursuit came faintly up.

The passage seemed to be occupied by offices. Harry walked along slowly. His heart was beating at an alarming rate and he thought, once, that he might pass out. He put a hand on the wall to steady himself, and then moved on.

At the end of the passage was another stairway, leading down, broader than the one he had come up. At the foot of this, voices were shouting orders. The alarm bell had stopped.

Beyond the stairhead, the passage ran on into a dead end, serving only one room. It must, he thought, be a turret room. If by any chance it was unoccupied he might be able to hide himself away in it. It would, at least, offer a respite.

A notice, painted on the wall outside the door, said DEAD FILES.

Harry turned the handle and walked in.

It was an octagonal room, almost full of filing cabinets and closets. At a desk in the middle, almost overborne by the forest of surrounding furniture, sat a tall, thin, untidy-looking man with gray hair and thick-lensed glasses.

He looked inquiringly at Harry whose mind was on what was happening outside. Harry could think of nothing to say.

There was no doubt about it. There were several sets of feet coming up the stairs, and they sounded heavy.

The thin man rose from his desk, took a couple of steps toward Harry, as if bringing him into focus, and said urgently, "You must be Harry Gordon. I gather that your appeal was unsuccessful."

"I didn't wait to see," said Harry. His mouth was dry, and he could hardly get the words out.

"I suggest you get into that closet," said the man. "It's only got my coat in it. And I suggest you get into it pretty damn quick." It was a long, thin closet made of very inferior wood. The door failed to fit by nearly half an inch at the top, and Harry could not only hear, he could see everything that happened.

There was a knock, the gray-haired man said, "Come in," in a commendably steady voice, and a police constable entered, followed by a court attendant.

The attendant said, "Oh, Mr.

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Harbord, there's a man escaped from the L.C.J.'s court. We think he's somewhere in the building."

"I hope he's not dangerous," said Mr. Harbord.

"It's Gordon—appeal for capital murder."

"I remember it. Killed a young woman."

The constable said impatiently, "I take it, sir, you've been in here some little time."

"All morning," said Mr. Harbord.

"Then if you wouldn't mind letting us know if you see anyone—you'll recognize him. He's got a beard."

"If I see anyone with a beard who looks like a murderer," said Mr. Harbord, "I'll shout so loud you'll hear it in the Bear Garden."

The end part of the sentence was said to himself, for the deputation had departed. As soon as the noise of their footsteps had died away Mr. Harbord came across and opened the closet door.

"All right for the moment," he said.

"I think," said Harry indistinctly, "bit dizzy. May be going to pass out."

"Hold on," said Mr. Harbord.

He got an arm under Harry's shoulders and half carried him across into the far corner of the room. Here stood a mountainous stack of files. "Have to shift them out a bit. Squat there. Get your head down between your legs."

Five minutes later Harry was under cover. His back was propped against the angle of the wall; he was sitting on a folded garment of thick black silk which Mr. Harbord had produced from a cabinet labeled *Obsolete Forms*, and to his right and in front of him rose a protective rampart, five feet high, of what he assumed to be Dead Files. His head stopped swimming and he was reasonably comfortable.

Mr. Harbord did not seem to have a great many visitors. At one o'clock he departed, locking his door, returning an hour later with a paper bag containing a slice of veal and ham pie, three tomatoes, a packet of potato crisps, and a can of beer which he punctured with a paper knife.

"Rough tack," he said, handing it down to Harry, "but it'll keep the wolf from the door."

"I've no complaints," said Harry. He ate every scrap of the food, taking care not to scatter the crumbs about, and finished the can of beer. His appetite had returned.

At about three o'clock the policeman came back. He was alone this time and in less of a hurry.

"Odd sort of setup you've got here," he observed.

"In what way?" inquired Mr. Harbord politely.

"Ruddy great place, like a castle. Never seen so many passages. Staircases inside one another. Wonder people don't get lost."

"Oh, they do," said Mr. Harbord. "Only the other day the

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Queen's Bench Number 9 was sitting late, an old lady went to sleep in the public gallery—came out in the dark—wandered for hours. One of the night porters heard her screaming."

"Spooky sort of place," agreed the constable. "I'll be getting on."

"Have you caught your man?"

"If you ask me," said the constable, "he isn't in the building at all. Got out before they shut the doors. Never mind. He won't get far, I promise you."

"I'm sure I hope not," said Mr. Harbord.

Harry found that he was able to listen to all this with detachment. The bulwark of Dead Files gave him a sense of absolute security.

In the latter part of the afternoon he dozed, waking with a start to find Mr. Harbord gazing down at him.

"It's half-past five," said Mr. Harbord. "In a quarter of an hour I shall be off."

"I don't know how to thank you," said Harry. "Give me five minutes start, then follow me out."

"Out?" said Mr. Harbord. "Don't be silly. You'll be picked up before you get past the door." Harry stared at him. "There's only one place in England, they won't be looking for you tonight and that's right here."

"But—"

"There'll be a cleaner along between six and seven. She'll be no trouble. Indeed, judging from the amount of cleaning she does, she won't be here more than five minutes. After that, your bedroom is entirely at your disposal. There's a wash basin—cold water, I'm afraid—and a lavatory along the corridor on the left. I've got hold of those—" he indicated a pair of dusty dark-green baize curtains. "Out of Master Sterngold's room—he's on vacation. They're a bit dusty but they'll keep you warm. Tomorrow we'll think about your future. I've got some ideas about that which I'd like to put to you."

Harry said, "Look. So far I haven't dared to ask. But I've got to know. Why are you doing it?"

"The trouble is," said Mr. Harbord, "I'm not sure just at this moment that I'm allowed to tell you anything at all. That's one of the things I'm going to find out tonight. For the moment you'll have to take me on trust."

"All right," said Harry, "I'll do that."

"Sleep well."

When the cleaner had come and gone, Harry made up his bed as best he could in the dark and stood for a few moments in the doorway listening to the Royal Courts of Justice composing itself for the night.

Doors were slammed shut, footsteps rattled down stone corridors, bells rang, elevators whined. Gradually the intervals between such sounds grew longer and longer. Later still, he heard the dull thud of heavy doors coming together—

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safety doors somewhere down in the vaults. Then silence.

It was a silence broken by a multitude of small noises unheard by day. There was a tapping, which he traced to a loose cable in the old-fashioned elevator housing. Boards and door frames creaked. Hot water pipes giggled. As he stood looking down into the darkness of the stairwell, a piece of stone detached itself from the roof above him and landed with a tiny clear tinkle on the tiles three floors below.

The whole building was settling down like a man to sleep. Harry retired to his own narrow couch. The curtains, as Mr. Harbord had said, were dusty, but they were warm. From the Strand, the Court clock boomed out the hours, echoed more faintly by St. Clements Dane and St. Bride's Fleet Street. In a surprisingly short space of time, Harry was fast asleep . . .

Superintendent Lacey got no sleep that night. He sat in the room that had been assigned to him at Scotland Yard. In front of him was the blue-covered file which contained Harry Gordon's private particulars.

It was an astonishingly comprehensive dossier. It contained details of his private address, of his club, of every hotel he was known to have stayed at; the addresses of his relatives, friends, and acquaintances; his solicitor, accountant, banker, and other professional contacts; of every place to which he might resort for help, for money, for advice, or for somewhere to lay his head. And to all those places patient men were directed with instructions to inquire and observe.

A description and a warning went to all hotels and boarding houses in the metropolis. Railways, coach stations, and Air Terminals were alerted. A special call went out to port and customs authorities, ticket offices and travel agencies.

"There's one advantage of living on an island," said Superintendent Lacey to Sergeant Knight. "It's damnably difficult to get out of. Do you realize that in two World Wars only one prisoner has succeeded in doing it?"

"Supposing he doesn't try to escape?"

"If he leaves London we'll pick him up before morning. If he keeps his head and lies low in London it may take longer. Maybe twenty-four hours. Maybe forty-eight. He's not a professional crook. He's got no contacts."

"I hope you're right, sir," said Sergeant Knight.

It was three o'clock in the morning and not the best time for optimism. Outside it started to rain.

At half-past eight the next day Mr. Harbord entered his room. There were lines of strain on his face but his voice sounded reassuringly level. "I hope you slept well," he

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said. He didn't look as if he had slept too well himself.

"Wonderfully," said Harry.

"This next bit is going to be a bit tricky. We've got to get you out. I can't see any way round this. We've got to take a chance."

"Look," said Harry, "before we start. I've cleared up all the mess behind there, so there's nothing to associate me with this room. If we hit trouble I'm going to run for it, *and you're not to get involved.*"

"Then let's hope we don't hit trouble," said Mr. Harbord. "Follow a few yards behind me and don't hurry."

He led the way along the corridor and down a spiral staircase into the basement. Twice when people approached, Mr. Harbord managed to switch his course into a side passage before any encounter could take place. The basement was a labyrinth without logic or symmetry. Harry soon lost all sense of direction.

"Close up now," said Mr. Harbord. Ahead of them was a small door at the top of half a dozen steps. "It's neck or nothing now."

He opened the door. They were in a back yard filled with coke. There was no one in sight. They crossed the yard, climbed a few more steps, and found themselves in a passageway. At the end of it was a main road, across which they dived into another passageway. At one end of it was a short alley full of small shops.

"In here," said Mr. Harbord.

It was a barber's shop. The blinds were down and it appeared to be closed, but Mr. Harbord turned the handle confidently and the door opened. There were three chairs, all empty. A large man with black hair and a flat, white face was standing beside the end one.

"Is this the job?" he said.

"This is the job," said Mr. Harbord. "Tom Cox, Harry Gordon."

"Pleased to meet you, Harry," said Mr. Cox. "Hop in that chair." And to Mr. Harbord, "He's all right for height. Bit narrower in the shoulders than I'd been led to expect."

"You can pad them."

"I'll fix them, don't you fuss."

"I'll see you in about an hour's time, then," said Mr. Harbord to Harry.

When he had gone, Tom locked the door.

"Don't open up till half-past nine. Should give us plenty of time. We'll have that beaver off, for a start. Then give you a nice close shave. Trim the hair up short. Suntan lotion all over. A military man on leave. That's how I see you."

While Mr. Cox talked, his nimble fingers were moving.

First he snipped away the trim black beard which had been Harry's pride, and his protest against conformity, for the past three years. Then he shaved him and started on his hair, cutting the sides back, thinning out the top and moving Harry's parting a couple of inches to the left. After that, he got out a

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bottle which smelled of resin and dabbed the contents on to the newly bared areas of Harry's face.

"It'll sting you a bit," said Tom, "but don't worry. You've no idea how smart it makes you look. All handsome men are slightly bronzed this season. While we're waiting for it to dry off, we'll get you togged out."

He opened a closet in which a number of suits were arranged on hangers. None of them were new, but they looked as if they had come from a good tailor. After a critical scrutiny, Mr. Cox selected one of decent, dark-gray flannel with a faint chalk stripe.

"It'll fit you where it touches," he said. "I only got the word late last night, or I'd have found you some more to choose from."

In fact, it was quite a good fit. The coat was the right length, but too ample in the waist. Mr. Cox got out a needle and thread and ran a few stitches into the lining.

"It'll do for today. Get you something a bit better tomorrow. Goes quite well with your brown shoes, which is a bit of luck because shoes mightn't have been too easy. Have to change the tie."

"What's wrong with it?"

"A bit Chelsea for the character we had in mind. I got an M.C.C. one for you. Lovely color—but too risky. Unless you happen to be a member."

"I'm afraid not," said Harry. He settled for a Royal Artillery tie and wandered across to the looking glass to tie it.

"Good lord!" he said.

"It's the haircut that makes the difference," said Tom. "You'd be surprised. I had a youngster in here the other day. Regular young tearabout. Bow wave, sideboards, and all. Wanted a job in a solicitor's office. When I'd finished with him, he might have come straight out of the celestial choir. Got the job, too. You'd better pop out and get breakfast, now. I've got to open up."

Three-quarters of an hour later, fortified by an excellent breakfast, Harry reported back to Dead Files.

Mr. Harbord examined him critically.

"Not bad," he said. "An inch of white handkerchief in the top pocket, and a brief case."

"Why the brief case?"

"Most people here carry brief cases," said Mr. Harbord. "You can borrow this one for the time being. Now, let me think. You're a regular soldier, but you're thinking of leaving the army and taking up the law. A surprising number of them do that. You've decided to listen to a few cases in Court. When the courts shut down at four o'clock, go out and have a good high tea, and come back here as near to half-past five as you can make it."

"I'll do that," said Harry, "but on one condition."

Mr. Harbord looked faintly surprised. "Condition?"

"That you tell me why you and

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Tom Cox, and other friends of yours, too, I gather, are breaking the law, taking fantastic risks, for a complete stranger."

Mr. Harbord considered the matter. "All right," he said. "I've got permission to tell you a certain amount. Now's as good a time as any. If someone comes in you can be inquiring for a file."

"My aunt," said Harry, "was engaged in litigation twenty years ago. Her name was Smith." He sat down on the chair beside Mr. Harbord's desk and waited.

"The fact of the matter is," said Mr. Harbord at last, "that you're the King's horse."

"I'm what?"

"The King's horse in the Derby. Do you remember Emily Davison? She threw herself in front of the King's horse in the 1913 Derby, and was killed. That was the moment when people started to take the suffragettes seriously."

"I think I begin to see," said Harry.

"We're all members of a Society which has no name, no rules, no officers, and no subscription. And it has only one object—the abolition of capital punishment. There are a number of reputable and well-known bodies who are campaigning for the same object. We have no connection with any of them. We are unknown, and disreputable. And the difference between us and what I might call the official bodies is a very simple one. We are prepared to break the law. They are not."

Harry said, "It's quite an important distinction, isn't it?"

"It's a vital distinction. No one has ever forced the government to change its mind without resorting to violence and illegality—unofficial strikes, public nuisance, assault, boycotting, terrorism."

Harry was fascinated by the gentle but inflexible obstinacy in the face opposite him.

"If you've got no central organization," he said, "how do you function?"

"Mostly we work on our own, seizing our own opportunities, as they occur. We are, for instance, quite prepared to commit perjury if the need arises. Do you remember the truck driver who turned up at the last moment and destroyed the Crown case against Annetts? He was a member."

"But if you want help—or guidance?"

"There is a telephone number I can ring. It is manned night and day. And in an extreme emergency there is a man I can see. You won't expect me to tell you his name. I saw him last night. It's with his permission that I've told you as much as I have. He is making arrangements to get you out of the country. There are still one or two places in the globe which haven't signed extradition treaties with us."

"And until then?"

"Until then, we suggest you stay

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exactly where you are. It is, I think, the very last place that anyone will come looking for you."

"Damn and blast it," said Superintendent Lacey. "He must be *somewhere*."

"Hotel reports negative. Boarding houses ditto. Casualty wards, doss houses, and hospitals ditto. Brothels ditto."

"All right, all right. I've read them. What I want is a suggestion, not a list of dittos."

Sergeant Knight was on the point of saying, "It isn't my place to make suggestions," but reflected that neither of them had had any sleep for nearly forty-eight hours. "I think, sir," he said, "that we ought to work on the assumption that he's got out of London."

"Spread the search, you mean?" The Superintendent considered. A spread meant involving the Borough and County Forces; and it meant a lot of coordination and paperwork. But it also meant that he could go to bed.

"I'm beginning to believe you're right," he said. "If he'd been in London, we'd have him by now. Particularly with his picture in every paper."

"With *and* without beard," said Sergeant Knight. "That was a good idea of yours, sir."

"It'll be a good idea if it works. All right. We'll spread the net . . ."

It is astonishing how quickly the power of routine, even an outlandish routine, will establish itself. Harry left the Court every morning, soon after the doors were opened, slipping out by the Carey Street entrance; he was shaved and touched up by Tom Cox, had a leisurely breakfast, and was back in Court by ten o'clock. He spent timeless hours drifting round the corridors resting, from time to time, in the public gallery of one or other of the Courts.

He listened to Mr. Justice Neville reading out a long and complicated judgment on the ownership of chattels in transit. He took his midday meal in the dining room on the ground floor which was full of barristers eating mixed grills and reassuring anxious clients. At half-past four he went out and had a large tea. By six he was tucked into his bed.

This was the part he found most difficult. Mr. Harbord had rearranged the rampart of files so that Harry's hiding place was now entirely roofed over, and proof from all but a very thorough search. The difficulty was that once inside this narrow coffin, he had nothing to do.

On the fourth night he devised a palliative. There was a five-amp wall socket in the skirting board just outside his hiding place and he plugged one of Mr. Harbord's table lamps into it. A few experiments convinced him that not a glimmer of light could be seen from the outside.

The files which walled him in were arranged alphabetically with their titles toward him. He decided

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to start with Aarvold vs. The Random Window Cleaning Company. The file contained what he guessed to be copies of the documents retained by the Court at the conclusion of the case. It started with a *Statement of Claim.*

Harry was fascinated to observe the variety and unexpectedness of matters in which litigants had seen fit to invoke the assistance of the High Court. Neighbors had cut down trees or refused to cut down trees, had played radios too loud or cards too well, had refused to speak to each other or spoken too pointedly.

Toward midnight he had reached Baker vs. Lovegrove. Mr. Lovegrove had rashly contracted to supply Mr. Baker with as much whiskey as he could consume "until Hell froze." Finding this an onerous undertaking, the defendant had ingeniously argued that "Hell" was the name of a pond in his locality. ("Settled on agreed terms," the file concluded.) As he was replacing it, Harry spotted a name which made his heart give a little jump.

"Barker vs. Mann."

"Stop imagining things," he said aloud, "it's a common enough name."

But it was Janine all right.

She had been sued by Stewart Barker, her agent, for breach of contract, and had counterclaimed to have her agency agreement set aside. The case had lasted five days and Janine had won.

Two o'clock was booming out from the Strand before Harry laid the papers aside and fell into a troubled sleep.

The next morning he placed the file on Mr. Harbord's desk.

"I don't remember it, particularly," said Mr. Harbord. "My job's to see they're in order and put away. What's interesting about it?"

"*Anything* about Janine's past interests me," said Harry. "Because it might lead to the man she was going to visit that night."

"It sounds like a long shot to me," said Mr. Harbord doubtfully. "When did all this happen? Seven years ago?"

"What happened," said Harry, "was that she had a contract with this agent, Stewart Barker. She was a rising young star then—in fact, she had risen. It was after her first big success. Barker was taking twenty-five per cent of all her earnings. She thought it was too much, and refused to pay him. He sued her for breach of contract. Her defense was that she had actually been under age when she signed the contract, and that Barker had altered the date on it."

"What happened?"

"That's the maddening part about your files. Like a serial. They break off just when things get exciting. I know she won. But that's all."

"Her solicitors, I see, were Bailey and Beeding."

"That's right. It's a one-man

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show now. Alfred Beeding. He's my solicitor too."

"Is someone taking my boss' name in vain?"

Two heads jerked round. A girl had come into the room. Harry recognized her at once. It was Bridget Avery. And it was perfectly clear that Bridget had recognized him.

For a terrible moment he thought she was going to scream. Harry measured the distance to the door. He could reach it before she could. He might have to knock her down to gain the necessary start. It was not a pleasant thought.

"What are you doing here?" She spoke softly, as if frightened of being overheard. Her eyes shuttled from him to Mr. Harbord. There was no hostility in them. Shock, perhaps, and fear; but fear for him, not for herself. "I thought—why aren't you a long way off?"

Harry was thinking furiously. She wasn't going to give him away. He was certain of that. Perhaps she was on his side. But he mustn't give his friends away.

Mr. Harbord made the decision for him, as calmly as he had taken the one four days earlier.

"It was safer for him to stay here," he said.

"Then you're—?"

"Yes. I'm helping him. Are you going to give us away?"

"As if I would." The scorn in her voice startled Harry.

Mr. Harbord looked at her shrewdly. "We haven't had time," he said, "to find out who you are."

"I'm Bridget Avery."

"You're Mr. Beeding's secretary, aren't you?" said Harry. "I saw you in Court. And you came, once, with Beeding and Hargest Macrea to see me in Pentonville."

"I was in the whole case from beginning to end. I've never been more miserable in my life. When you hit that warder and disappeared from the box I nearly stood up and screamed—'Go on. Go on. Get away, quick.' I didn't think you had half a chance, really."

"I'm not sure I've got more than three-quarters of one now. And anything I have got is due to this gentleman."

"I was originally going to suggest," said Mr. Harbord, "that you went away and forgot all about us. If you work in Mr. Beeding's office, though, I'm not so sure now."

"You don't think I'd tell him do you?"

"I'm confident you wouldn't. What I meant was that you might be able to get hold of some information for us." He indicated the open file. "There was a case about seven years ago involving the murdered girl and her agent—"

"A man called Stewart Barker?"

"You remember it?"

"No, but that's the reason I've come to see you." They stared at her. "That's the file I was sent over to find."

There was a long moment of

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silence in the turret room. Remembering it later, Harry thought it was like the moment of stillness when the orchestra had finished one theme, and the first soft, enigmatic note is struck which heralds the introduction of a new motif. He realized that something of the utmost importance had been said. The difficulty was grasping it.

"*Who* sent you?"

"Mr. Henry—he's our litigation clerk."

"An elderly man," said Mr. Harbord, "with a face like a clown—a sad one."

"That's the one."

"But *why* does he want it?" said Harry.

"Because our file on the case seems to have disappeared."

"Disappeared?"

"I can't understand it. You know how carefully papers are looked after in lawyers' offices. They're all docketed, and indexed, and put away. When Mr. Henry went to look for this one, it wasn't there. It seems someone must have taken it without recording it and not put it back."

"But why did he want to look at it, particularly?"

"He's been behaving very oddly lately. He keeps talking about Janine. He had some idea that there was a connection between that other case and—and what happened to her."

"And that's why he wanted to look at the old file?"

"That's right."

"And it wasn't there?"

"No."

"Have you any idea who could have taken it?"

"It must have been someone in the office, I should imagine. It could hardly have been a burglar from outside."

"No," said Mr. Harbord. "No, indeed. Most interesting. Mr. Henry, if I remember rightly, is something of a drinker."

"He's been drinking a lot lately."

"Has he indeed?" said Mr. Harbord. "It sounds as if he has something on his mind. I wonder what it could be?"

Harry spent the rest of the morning in Chancery Court Number 2 listening to an interesting case about a disputed will. He was somewhat distracted by the attempts of his neighbor, a middle-aged lady in a daffodil-yellow hat, to draw him into conversation, but he was feeling so cheerful that morning that he was tolerant even of her chatter.

In the luncheon interval Mr. Harbord locked up his office and descended to the buffet.

His first objective was a corner table where he found an untidy, aggressive man with the look of a wire-haired fox terrier, called Mr. Tarragon. Since Mr. Tarragon had a second glass of beer ready on the table, it was clear that he was expecting Mr. Harbord. They talked quietly for some time, Mr. Harbord

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scribbled an address on a piece of paper, and pushed it across the table. Mr. Tarragon finished his beer and went out.

At the other end of the crowded L-shaped bar, Mr. Henry was standing by himself, drinking whiskey. His long, red, heavy face lightened a fraction as he saw Mr. Harbord elbowing his way toward him.

"How are the files, Charlie?"

"They're dead, but they won't lie down," said Mr. Harbord. "What's that? Scotch?"

"With water," said Mr. Henry. "Soda water's too strong for me these days."

"Double Scotch and water, miss."

"You want something out of me," said Mr. Henry. "You've never stood me a double Scotch before."

"I want some advice," said Mr. Harbord. He slid easily into a technical discussion . . .

The wire-haired Mr. Tarragon was plodding up a flight of stairs in a tall building in Denmark Street. The pebble-glass door on the third landing said *Stewart Barker, Theatrical and Musical Agent.*

Mr. Tarragon knocked and went in. The fat girl wedged behind the desk in the corner said that Mr. Barker was out to lunch. She wasn't sure when he'd be back. He didn't usually get back from lunch before three.

Mr. Tarragon said that, in that case, he'd get some lunch himself, and call back, and why didn't they have an elevator put in? The fat girl said that it was because the building was due to be pulled down, and as far as she was concerned it couldn't happen too soon . . .

By a quarter to three the atmosphere in the Law Courts bar was thick; thick with talk, thick with smoke, thick with the exhalation of alcoholic confidence.

A tear had gathered in the outer corner of Mr. Henry's right eye. Mr. Harbord had watched it filling and swelling. Any moment now it was going to fall. Any moment now Mr. Henry was going to talk.

Twice he had come to the brink. There was a heavy weight of unshared secrets in the old man's mind; a load of oppression which it longed to shed, yet dared not; a damned-up flow of suspicion and guilt which wanted to burst free, but was held back by a lifetime of professional reticence.

"Time for one more," said Mr. Harbord.

Mr. Henry said, "Look, Charlie. I'm not going back to the office this afternoon. I don't think I could stand it. There's a little place I know round the corner—a sort of club."

Mr. Harbord thought quickly. His door was locked. He rarely had visitors in the afternoon. "Fine," he said.

"It was all a long time ago," said Stewart Barker. "And I don't see a lot of point in digging it up again. If that bitch had still been alive I'd

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have moved heaven and earth to get even with her, but as it is—"

"If you could tell me exactly what happened," said Mr. Tarragon, "I might be able to tell you what use we could make of the information. Until I know that, I'm as much in the dark as you are."

Stewart Barker tried to work this out, but got lost about halfway through it and said, "I'm quite prepared to tell you about it. *I've* got nothing to be ashamed of. Janine Mann first came to me when she was eighteen. She'd been to drama school, but she hadn't any obvious talent, except a cast-iron determination to get on—which is the only thing that really matters in the long run. I got her a few parts—provincial tours, pier shows in the summer, pantomime in the winter. I doubt if she made two hundred a year the first two years. I took a quarter of it, and was out of pocket by the bargain."

Mr. Tarragon nodded. It wasn't clear to him how Stewart Barker could have twice received £50 and been out of pocket when all he had to do was make a few telephone calls, but he was well aware of the convention that agents always lost money promoting hopeful clients.

"Soon after that she got her first chance in the West End. *And* she took it, with both hands. I grant her that. One thing led to another—stage, films, television. Nothing succeeds like success—in the world of entertainment, anyway. She made a lot of money. And what stuck in her dear little throat was that she had to pay a quarter of it over to me. A month after she came of age she signed a regular agency contract—as watertight as my lawyers could make it—Duxford & Timmis. I expect you know them?"

Mr. Tarragon smiled thinly and said that he did, indeed, know Messrs. Duxford and Timmis.

"Imagine my surprise when the little so-and-so came along, cool as you like, to my office one morning and said, 'I'm not paying you twenty-five per cent any more, Stewart. You can have ten, or I'll change my agent.' I said, you can't do that. I've got a contract. She said, 'We'll see about that—good morning.' Just like that."

"I imagine you took her to court."

"Certainly I took her to court. *I'd* got nothing to be ashamed of, had I?"

"And I imagine you won the case."

"Then you imagine wrong," said Mr. Barker. "Her story—or rather her lawyer's story—a man called Beeding was trying the case for her—was that she signed the contract before her twenty-first birthday; and I'd put the date in afterwards."

"A bit difficult to prove, surely."

"She proved it, all right. She produced a letter on my office notepaper, signed by me, dated a fortnight before her twenty-first birthday, saying, *Come to my office tomorrow and sign all the papers.* I can't

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remember the exact wording. That was the effect of it."

"And did *you* write—?"

"Of course I didn't. If I'd been trying anything like that, do you imagine I'd have written? I'd have rung her up."

"How did she work it?"

"Pinched a bit of notepaper from my office—she might even have typed it on my girl's machine—she was alone in the outer office for a quarter of an hour one morning. Then forged my signature."

"She took a few risks," said Mr. Tarragon.

Harry spent the afternoon in Queen's Bench 3, listening to a personal injury case. He was aggrieved to find that the lady in the daffodil hat had followed him; but his mind was not really on her, or on the case. He was thinking what an extraordinarily nice girl Bridget was.

At six o'clock Mr. Beeding sat alone in his office in New Square, Lincoln's Inn. He was considering the problem of his litigation clerk, Mr. Henry.

First, there was the problem of his drinking, which had grown worse lately. Secondly, there was the question of his unamiability which had developed into definite truculence. Thirdly, and most disturbing, were the hints he had started dropping.

Mr. Beeding was an extremely methodical man. Attention to detail was one of the keys to his success. Planning ahead was another.

A simple solution would be to sack Mr. Henry. But there were arguments against that. To start with, he was a very experienced litigation clerk. And if he was sacked, he would start making wild accusations. And however wild an accusation might be, in Mr. Beeding's experience, if it was repeated often enough, people would start believing it.

His train of thought was interrupted by the sound of a door slamming, followed by a scuffle of feet down the passage.

Mr. Beeding got up and opened his own door.

"Come in here," he said. "I want to talk to you."

Mr. Henry shambled in and sat down, uninvited, in the chair beside the desk.

"Have you been drinking all afternoon?"

"I've been with an official of the court."

"Drinking?"

"We might have had a drink or two."

"I'm afraid it's got to stop."

Mr. Henry looked at him. The firelight gleamed on Mr. Beeding's round, polished glasses. His face was smooth and composed. The mouth pursed up in a tight smile which hid the teeth. It was a face carefully composed to conceal the thoughts behind it.

"Why the hell should I stop?"

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said Mr. Henry suddenly. "If I want a drink, I'll have it."

"You can drink yourself to perdition. But you'll do it on your own time. Not on the firm's."

Mr. Henry leaned forward in his chair. He seemed to be trying to penetrate the screen to see what lay behind the rosy light which hid Mr. Beeding's eyes.

He said, "I'll take no orders from you."

"In that case, I presume you'll be leaving us."

"No. You're not sacking me, either."

"Indeed," said Mr. Beeding. "That will produce rather a difficult situation, won't it? Why should I agree to having you here if you're not going to do what you are told?"

"I'll tell you why," said Mr. Henry. "It's because I stayed here late one night—about four months ago."

Mr. Beeding shifted in his chair. If Mr. Henry had chanced to be looking he could have seen into his eyes, now.

"It's not a thick wall between your room and mine. I heard someone come in through that door." He indicated the private door which led from the office direct to the street. "I wondered who would be visiting you after office hours and I soon found out. She didn't trouble to keep her voice down."

"It was a lady, then?"

"It was Janine Mann. And she was asking for money."

"Indeed," said Mr. Beeding. He had moved again and the red light was back in his eyes. "Indeed. And did I give her any?"

"Not there and then. You told her to come down that night to your house at Staines. You said you'd let her have two hundred pounds in cash. You told her it'd be the last payment she'd get. And," said Mr. Henry gently, "it *was* the last, wasn't it?"

"I'm not so sure," said Mr. Beeding, "that I understand you."

"You understand me all right," said Mr. Henry. "But if you want it plain, I'll give it to you plain. Janine Mann came in here asking for money and, from what I heard, it wasn't the first time either. You said, I haven't got any money here—which was a bloody lie, because there was nearly seven hundred pounds in there." He indicated the green and gold door of the big wall safe, almost a small strongroom, behind the desk. "I'd put it there myself that morning. However, we'll pass that up. You told her she could have two hundred pounds if she came down to your house that evening, which happens to be the evening she was found dead in her car."

"*In* Harry Gordon's back yard. *With* a bullet from Harry Gordon's pistol in her."

"Oh, it came out very nice for you in the end."

"It seems to me," said Mr. Beeding, "that you must have been tell-

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ing yourself some story about all this—some story which involves me. Suppose you allow me to hear it."

As he spoke, he shifted very lightly in his chair. If Mr. Henry had been watching him closely, he might have noticed it. It was the sort of controlled premeditated move which a domestic cat makes as it works into position for the pounce.

Mr. Henry said, "It's plain enough. She had something on you. And it's not hard to guess what it was. Because I've been looking at the Stewart Barker papers. You pinched our office file, but you forgot there's a second set of papers over in the Court. And I was talking to one of their men about it this afternoon. Curious case, wasn't it?"

"I don't remember it particularly. You must remind me."

"She wasn't getting anywhere—not until she produced this letter on Stewart Barker's notepaper, typed in his office, with what looked like his signature on the bottom of it."

"And are you suggesting that Janine typed that letter herself? And forged his signature? Rather an elaborate plot for a young girl to have thought out, surely."

"I don't suppose she thought it out for herself," said Mr. Henry. "My idea was that *you* put her up to it, and won her case for her, so that you could get—whatever it was you wanted. Which was very nice for you. For a time. Only you hadn't thought things out quite as clearly as she had. Because what you hadn't realized was that it put *you* in *her* power, not *her* in *yours*. Any time she chose to open her pretty little mouth she could land you up to your neck in the dirt. All she had to say was, 'I was only a girl. He told me what to do. I didn't realize how wrong it was.' People might have been sorry for her—but they wouldn't have been sorry for you. Not on your life, they wouldn't. What a lovely blow-up. What a gorgeous meal for the papers. Middle-aged solicitor seduces girl client. Forgery and fraud. Law Society acts. It'd have been as good as a Cup Final."

"I see. And I shot her that night at my house to prevent her squeezing any more money out of me?"

"That's about it," said Mr. Henry. "It was a bit of luck for you she had her boy friend's gun with her. Maybe that's what put you in mind to drop her back in his yard. Mind you, I don't expect you to admit any of this."

"Oh, but I do," said Mr. Beeding. "You're absolutely right. That's almost exactly what happened. Except that the actual shooting was an accident. The gun went off when I was trying to get it away from her."

Mr. Henry looked up sharply. He seemed to become aware of the stillness in the office. It was silent in the square outside, too. The last car had driven away; no more voices, no more footsteps on the pavement; a few scattered lights in the windows opposite.

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For the first time the idea of danger penetrated Mr. Henry's drink dulled brain.

"Why are you telling me this?" He pulled himself out of the chair, and swayed to his feet. Mr. Beeding had moved, too, and was standing beside him.

"I'm telling you," he said, "because I'm sure that you'll respect the confidence."

Mr. Henry said. "Certainly."

And it was all he had time to say—for Mr. Beeding's hand whipped round from behind him, grasping a heavy black cylindrical ruler. He hit Mr. Henry once, on the side of the forehead. The sound was like billiard balls, kissing gently. Mr. Henry folded forward on to his knees.

Moving with surprising speed, Mr. Beeding got round behind the old man and, clasping his arms around his chest, half carried, half dragged him to the tall safe. Holding the limp body in the crook of his left arm, and supporting it with his knee, Mr. Beeding lifted the flaccid right hand and clasped it round the big brass safe handle. Keeping Mr. Henry's hand carefully under his own, he turned and pulled. The door opened.

There were shelves on each side, stacked with documents, and at the back a number of locked drawers. In the middle there was just enough clear space for a man to stand upright.

Mr. Henry had started groaning softly and shaking his head.

Mr. Beeding hoisted him forward, until his feet were inside the threshold, then he released him, stepped back, and slammed the door shut. Using the ruler, he tapped the brass handle, very gently, until he felt it engage . . .

"It was horrible," said Bridget. "He was dead. I never liked him, but I was nearly sick when I heard."

They were sitting in Mr. Harbord's room, and Mr. Harbord having departed on one of his rare, official errands, they were alone.

She looked so white and shaken that Harry felt an absurd impulse to stroke her on the side of the neck. He resisted the impulse.

"No wonder it upset you," he said. "Was the safe shut?"

"I don't think so. At least—not properly. They seem to think it was an accident."

"The police think that?"

"Yes. At least, that's what Mr. Beeding told us."

"He did, did he?" said Harry. There was a problem which had to be tackled sooner or later. He said, "Do you think we ought to let Mr. Beeding in on this? He is my solicitor. He ought to be on my side." He could feel her resistance to the idea. "Or don't you think that's a good idea?"

"I don't know," she said unhappily.

"You don't like him, do you?"

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"He's all right. He's perfectly easy to work for, I mean."

"He doesn't ask you to take dictation sitting on his knee?"

"Don't be silly."

"The point is," said Harry, "do we trust him, or don't we? You know him a lot better than I do. That's why I'm asking you.

"It's that file—the one that disappeared."

"Do you think Beeding took it?"

"Either it's a coincidence—if so, a pretty big coincidence—or else, well, I mean—who else could it have been? He and Mr. Henry were the only two people who could have had any interest in it. They were the only two who were in the office when the Stewart Barker case was on. The rest of us are all new. Anyway, why should a typist or a mail-room boy bother to steal a seven-year-old file?"

As she was talking, Harry was watching her face. He thought: she's got brains as well. She *is* a nice girl.

"It's a thought," he said. "But I don't quite see where it gets us. What you'll have to do is keep your eyes and ears wide open. I'm sure there *is* a connection between the two cases. I've felt it all along. But I'm damned if I can see just what it is."

"According to our pathologist's report," said Superintendent Lacey, "he didn't die of suffocation. He died of shock. If he'd kept his head, there was enough air in the strong-room to have lasted him until morning."

"What a thousand pities," said Mr. Beeding. "Have you any idea how—any further evidence to show what actually happened?"

"He could have come in to put away some papers. The door slammed shut behind him. That could shift the handle—it was only barely engaged. Enough to stop him opening the door, though. You've no idea what time he came back?"

"The whole thing's a mystery," said Mr. Beeding. "He went over to the Courts at about half-past eleven. He had an appointment in front of the Master. It shouldn't have taken him more than fifteen minutes. But no one saw him come back to the office. He certainly hadn't got back by the time I left, which was well after six."

"We know how he spent some of that time," said the Superintendent. "His stomach was still full of whiskey. Did you know that he drank?"

"I'm afraid so. Yes."

"Wasn't it a little dangerous—keeping an employee like that?"

"It's only very recently that it got bad. As a matter of fact, I'd made my mind up to talk to him about it. Is it important—now?"

"It could have been one of the subsidiary causes of death. If he came in so full of drink he didn't know what he was doing—blundered about in that strongroom. There was quite a bruise on his fore-

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head. It looks as if he fell forward—tripped over one of those boxes on the floor, perhaps—and hit his head."

"But surely if—?" Mr. Beeding stopped, got up abruptly, and walked across to the window.

"Yes, sir?"

"I was going to say, I don't suppose we shall ever know exactly what happened."

"Probably not," said the Superintendent politely. "By the way," he added, "on quite a different topic. We've found some property of yours. If you'd like to come round to Cannon Row and sign for it you can have it."

"Of mine?"

"Unless there's another Alfred Beeding in the Law List?"

"What sort of property?"

"It's a silver cigarette box. With your name in it. A gift from a grateful client?"

"Good heavens! Where on earth did it turn up?"

"At a pawnbroker's. An honest one, luckily. He was a bit suspicious about the customer who handed it in, along with some other items. Thought he recognized him as a man with a record. So he gave us details of the stuff."

"I'll certainly be glad to get it back."

"Did you report the loss, sir?"

"It disappeared from my desk in this room about a month ago. I didn't wish to cast suspicion on either my staff or my clients, so I kept quiet about it.—Not now, Miss Avery. We're busy."

"I'm sorry," said Bridget. "I thought the Superintendent had gone."

"I'm just going," said Superintendent Lacey. "And thank you for being so helpful."

"It was a lie," said Bridget. "A complete, absolute, downright lie."

"How do you mean?" asked Mr. Harbord.

"He said that this silver cigarette box was stolen from the desk in his office—and that he didn't say anything about it because he didn't want to upset his staff and his clients. All lies."

Harry said, "Calm down, Bridget. Take a deep breath. Explain."

"First, he never had a silver cigarette box in the office—not in the last two years."

"You're sure?"

"I'm his secretary. I ought to know."

"Right."

"And if he *had* had one, and it *had* been stolen, he'd have raised the roof. Good heavens, I remember about six months ago, when a fiver disappeared from petty cash, we practically had to turn our pockets out."

"The important point," said Mr. Harbord, "is not that he's lying. Lots of people do that. The important point is, *why* is he lying?"

"He's worried about something."

"Mr. Henry?"

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"No, something before that. He's been worried for months. And more than worried. He's scared."

"If we knew what he was scared *of*," said Harry, "I believe we might be getting somewhere."

"He could be telling the truth," said Superintendent Lacey to Anderson, the Assistant Commissioner. "It could have happened exactly as he said. We've traced Henry's movements. He'd been drinking at the Law Courts bar at lunchtime, and after that in a private club. He must have had half to three-quarters of a bottle of whiskey inside him by the time he got back to the office. He could have wanted to put something away in the safe—he and Beeding both had keys—and the door could have slammed shut. He might have got into a panic and tumbled forward and hit his head. The shock and the blow could easily have stopped his heart."

"Yes?" said the Assistant Commissioner.

"We fingerprinted the safe handle. There are old prints of Beeding's and a thumbprint of his secretary. But quite clearly superimposed on all of them—and obviously the newest—is a set of prints from Henry's right hand. Thumb and all four fingers."

"And yet," said the Assistant Commissioner, "you don't seem very happy about it."

"It was a tiny thing, sir. But it occurred to me that if Henry had gone into the strongroom—either to put something away or take something out—wouldn't he have turned the light on?"

"Is there a light?"

"Oh, yes, sir. The switch is just outside the door."

"And the light wasn't on when he was found?"

"Apparently not, sir."

"Someone might have turned it off afterwards. The cleaner?"

"They might," agreed Superintendent Lacey. "And it wasn't really the fact of the light being off that was odd. What was strange was that Beeding suddenly thought of it himself—it was when I was talking about Mr. Henry tripping over something on the floor. He started to say, 'But surely if the light was on, he'd have seen it? Something like that, anyway. Then he suddenly changed his mind and turned it, rather clumsily, into something else."

The Assistant Commissioner considered the matter. He respected Lacey's instinct, but it hardly sounded like concrete evidence of wrongdoing.

"Anything new on the Harry Gordon case?"

"We've had an enormous number of reports from people who've seen him in different places, from Gretna Green to the Isle of Wight. We check 'em if they look at all promising." The Superintendent chuckled. "There's one I meant to show you. It was from a middle-aged lady with

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a rather eccentric style of writing. Apparently she sat next to him on two occasions in the public gallery of the Law Courts."

The Assistant Commissioner laughed too. "He hasn't got very far, has he? Could there be any connection?"

"Connection between what, sir?"

"The two cases—Harry Gordon and Mr. Henry."

The Superintendent was used to eccentric suggestions from his chief, but he felt that this one went a bit far.

"How could there be, sir?"

"Beeding's a common factor. He was Gordon's solicitor, wasn't he?"

"He was, sir. But even so—"

"I know. It's mad. All the same—would you leave the files on both cases here for an hour. I'll browse through them. Something might strike me."

"I'll have them sent up straight away," said the Superintendent, and made his escape.

Ten minutes later the Assistant Commissioner suddenly stopped turning the papers in the folder which dealt with the death of Mr. Henry. What he was reading was a report from Detective Sergeant Knight, who had been looking into the question of how Mr. Henry had spent the last afternoon of his life. Inquiries had led the Sergeant to a senior employee of the Royal Courts of Justice, who had admitted drinking with Mr. Henry both at lunchtime and afterward in a private club. The employee's name was Harbord.

"Harbord," said the Assistant Commissioner softly to himself. "It's not a common name. I'm absolutely certain I've heard it before. But where? And when? And in what connection?"

He was still sitting in the dusk, thinking, when his secretary came in to turn the light on . . .

It was on the following morning, the sixth of his liberty, that Harry had an odd experience. He was walking along a dimly lit corridor on the second story of the West Wing of the Courts, rendered even dimmer by the fact that a rainstorm was blackening the summer sky outside. He was planning to look in on Appeal Court 3, where an interesting Divorce Appeal was in its third day.

At the far end of the passage, silhouetted against the light from the stairhead, a man was standing. He was facing away from Harry, and he was holding his umbrella behind his back, swinging it from side to side. The similarity to a squat animal, threshing its tail, was quite remarkable.

He suddenly remembered Miss Huckstep, who had given evidence, though ineffectively, on his behalf. Had she not described to the Court how she had passed the entrance to Sandpit Cottage at eleven o'clock on the fateful night and seen a man—a sinister-looking man—standing there, swinging his umbrella "like a great tail"?

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A conviction gripped him that the murderer of Janine Mann was standing in front of him.

As the thought passed through his mind, the man swung on his heel and walked briskly away. Determined not to lose him, Harry broke into a run.

This was a mistake. Startled by the sound of someone running after him, the man swung round.

Harry found himself face to face with Mr. Beeding.

The recognition was immediate, and mutual.

There was an instant in which neither man moved or spoke. Then Harry turned on his heel and ran off in one direction. After a moment's hesitation, Mr. Beeding doubled away in the opposite direction.

"You're sure?" said Superintendent Lacey.

"Absolutely certain. He'd shaved off his beard and dyed his face brown. And done something to his hair. But it was him, all right. And he recognized me."

"How do you know?"

"Because he ran away."

"How long ago was that?"

"Five minutes, I'm afraid. Perhaps more. The telephone I went to first was being used. I'm speaking from a box in Carey Street."

"All right," said the Superintendent. He spoke on the office line, and two carloads of men were moving in a matter of seconds. They would be too late. But he couldn't afford to take any chances. Even if they didn't catch Gordon in the Court building, he might be somewhere in the streets outside. He picked up the telephone again, and spoke to "A" Division headquarters.

Chief Superintendent Mace sounded skeptical.

"If that's right," he said, "he hasn't got very far in six days."

"Exactly what the A.C. said yesterday," said Lacey. "But I don't think this one's a false alarm. The man who tipped us off was his own solicitor."

"Queer sort of solicitor. Give away his own client."

The same thought had, in fact, occurred to Lacey. "Perhaps he thought his duty to the public came before his duty to his client."

"It'd be a nice change," said Mace, "if more solicitors thought that. Yes, of course I'll help. I'll put men on to combing all the streets and shops and restaurants in that area. All the same, I don't imagine he'll hang round now."

"We thought that last time," said Lacey. "Remember?"

When he reported the development to the Assistant Commissioner, which he did at the first opportunity, the Assistant Commissioner said, "Ah, that's it," as if an elusive memory had come home to roost. He approved, though absent-mindedly, the precautions which Lacey had taken, and as soon as he had departed, rang the bell for his secretary.

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"It was a capital case," he said. "At the Bedfordshire Assizes. Bellamy took it. Almost his last big trial. That would make it 1936, or perhaps early '37." He added certain further details. "See if you can unearth the file. And hurry, there's a good chap . . ."

When Mr. Harbord got back from lunch he found someone waiting outside the locked door of his room. It was a thick-set man, in his middle fifties, with a prow of a nose dominating a strong, clean-shaven face. Mr. Harbord, as he opened the door and ushered him in, thought that the face was familiar to him. A solicitor or a barrister, possibly.

"What can I do for you?" he said. "Do sit down."

"You are Mr. Harbord?"

"Yes."

"Was Charles Harbord your brother?"

Mr. Harbord looked at his visitor in blank astonishment.

"It's an impertinent question, I agree. But the name isn't a very common one."

Mr. Harbord said, "Before I answer any questions at all I should like to know who you are."

"Very reasonable. My name is Anderson. I was junior counsel for the defense in the case in which your brother was convicted of murder. I have never ceased to believe that he was wrongly convicted."

"It's a quarter of a century too late," said Mr. Harbord, "to do anything about it, isn't it?" The words were spoken gently, but there was a hard core to them.

"That's true," agreed his visitor. As he spoke his gray eyes were quartering the room. They lighted on the great stack of files in the corner. Yes, that would be the place. Obvious, if you knew, but an excellent hideout if you didn't. He added, "But all the same, the lesson I learned there has stood me in good stead since."

Mr. Harbord nodded. He seemed, thought his visitor, perfectly relaxed and absolutely at ease. He wasn't acting, either. Of course he would long since have cleared away any trace of Harry Gordon's presence. There would now be nothing at all to connect him with the matter.

"Particularly," the visitor went on, rising to his feet, "in my present job. I have never allowed myself to feel complacent about a capital conviction. I have never allowed a charge to be preferred unless I was convinced—personally convinced, I mean, not legally—that the man was guilty."

"And were you convinced in the case of Harry Gordon?"

"Yes, I was."

"Are you still?"

"That is a very leading question."

"So long as your mind isn't closed on the subject," said Mr. Harbord. "So long as it's open to honest conviction, then I should say that he still had a chance."

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His visitor looked at Mr. Harbord with a smile. What had really amused him was that, in spite of being given two chances to do so, he had not bothered to inquire what job his visitor did. Clearly an unusual man, thought the Assistant Commissioner, as he closed Mr. Harbord's door behind him and walked slowly away down the passage.

While a large force of uniformed and plain-clothes policemen combed the alleyways and shops between Chancery Lane, High Holborn, Kingsway, and the Strand, Harry was ensconced in a barber's chair. When a policeman poked his head in at the door, Sam Cox, the owner of the shop, was busily applying lather and addressing the recumbent figure as "Colonel." The policeman withdrew.

"I don't suppose they'll bother us again," said Sam. "You can stop in the back room all night if you like."

"No," said Harry. "It's very kind of you. But I'm not risking anyone else's neck for my own. You and Mr. Harbord have helped me enough."

"No risk. Slip the window catch. If they cop you, say you broke in. I don't know anything about it."

"They might fall for it," said Harry. "But I've got a feeling they wouldn't. They'd assume you'd been hiding me for the last six days. And the shaving and the haircut would both point straight to you."

"Have you got anywhere special in mind to go to?"

"Yes. I think I know where I want to go next."

Superintendent Lacey was unhappy. He had a feeling that answers to several of the questions which were puzzling him lay close to his hand. And most of them seemed connected, in a curious way, with Mr. Beeding. He had accepted his explanations about the cigarette box, but a further curious fact had now come to light and he felt keen to hear Mr. Beeding's explanation of it.

He found the solicitor behind a desk piled high with papers and files.

"Sorry to disturb you again," he said.

"I'll not pretend I'm glad to see you," said Mr. Beeding. "Without Mr. Henry to help me, I'm getting hopelessly behind."

"This won't take a minute."

"Then if you'll leave us, Miss Avery."

"Don't bother about her," said the Superintendent. "There's nothing confidential about this. You remember that cigarette box we recovered through a pawnbroker. This morning he sent us another item. It had been deposited by the same customer. And it had occurred to him that if one item was stolen this one might be, too."

The Superintendent put his hand into his pocket, pulled out a twist of tissue paper, and unscrewed it. A pair of thick, gold cuff links fell onto

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the desk. Mr. Beeding picked them up.

"Do they mean anything to you, sir?"

"Nice links," said Mr. Beeding. "Solid gold. I'll buy them myself, if they're for sale."

"Then I take it they're not your property?"

"Never seen them before in my life. Why?"

"If you look closely," said the Superintendent, "you'll see there's a monogram. Two letters, sort of twisted together. It looks like AB. And seeing that your Christian name's Alfred it did occur to us—"

"Do you think its AB? It looks more like BR to me. Or it might be LR."

"It's not very clear," agreed the Superintendent, wrapping up the links and dropping them back in his pocket. "It doesn't signify. We shall locate the owner as soon as we've found out who took 'em."

"Will you be able to do that?"

"The pawnbroker gave us a good description. In fact, he thought he recognized the man. That's why he was so careful. A character called Pokey Barrett. One leg shorter than the other. Another thing, Pokey's disappeared from his usual haunts lately, which could be connected with a housebreaking at Laleham. If we pick him up for that job we can soon sort out the rest."

As soon as she could get away Bridget hurried across to the Courts. She told Mr. Harbord what she had heard.

"It stuck out a mile," she said, "that there's something fishy about it. First, Mr. Beeding says the cigarette box was in the office and I know it wasn't. Now he says those cuff links don't belong to him, and I'm pretty certain I've seen him wearing them. And when the Superintendent mentioned Pokey Barrett and the burglary at Laleham—well, you ought to have seen his face."

"Even if you're right," said Mr. Harbord, "what connection has it got with the Harry Gordon case?"

"I thought you'd be able to work that out."

"You flatter me," said Mr. Harbord. "However, I can see one thing quite clearly. If there *is* a connection, only two people are likely to know what it is. Your employer and Pokey Barrett. I don't suppose it's any good asking Mr. Beeding. And Pokey's wanted by the police, and on the run."

"It does seem hopeless," agreed Bridget.

"Not hopeless. Difficult. Our organization has peculiar but effective methods of getting information, particularly in connection with criminals and legal matters. I shall have to make a telephone call. Not from here. From a public call box." He looked at his watch. "Four o'clock. If the information's available it won't take more than an hour or two to collect. The trouble is that I

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daren't take the return call either here or at home. I'm under a certain degree of suspicion."

"Under suspicion? How do you know?"

"Immediately after lunch I had a visit from no less a person than the Assistant Commissioner in charge of the C.I.D. His name is Anderson. We had an interesting discussion—about old times."

"It was too late for him to find anything—"

"He didn't come to look for things. He came to confirm a private suspicion that this was where Harry Gordon had been hiding. And he confirmed it. He's not a fool."

Bridget said, "I could take the return message. When I stay late at the office to finish off some work, I get the exchange to leave a line through to my room. I'll do that tonight." She scribbled down the telephone number. "When I've got the reply, I'll meet you—where?"

"Outside the ticket office in Leicester Square Underground Station."

"All right. Then we can think what to do next."

She sounded so forlorn as she said it that Mr. Harbord was impelled to smile. "I've known worse tangles sort themselves out." But not many, he added to himself, as he made his way down to the telephone.

Bridget had no difficulty in persuading Mr. Beeding that she would have to stay late. The events of the last few days had so distracted the office that most of the routine work was behind.

At half-past five she settled down in her sanctum and started to type out a long lease. Only half her mind was on the keys of the typewriter; the other half was waiting for the telephone to ring, wondering what the message would be, wondering what Harry Gordon was doing.

At six o'clock she heard Mr. Beeding's door slam. At half-past six the cleaning woman arrived, poked her head into Bridget's room, and said, "Still here, dearie? I'll do you tomorrow."

Bridget finished the lease, then three letters which she had in her book. Half-past seven boomed out distantly from the Law Courts' clock. Bridget decided to wait five more minutes. The silence in the office was complete.

The shrilling of the telephone made Bridget's heart rocket. She steadied herself and lifted the receiver.

"Beeding's," she said. "Mr. Beeding's secretary, Miss Avery, speaking."

There was a moment's silence, and then a very gentle voice with a slight North Country burr said, "Good evening, Miss Avery. I had a message for you. I'm afraid it'll be a disappointment. Pokey Barrett was picked up by the police this afternoon—for a job he did at Laleham. He's being held at Cannon Row police station."

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"I see," said Bridget. "Well. Thank you very much."

The voice said, "I'm sorry." There was a click and the line went dead.

As Bridget replaced the receiver, the door opened and Mr. Beeding came in. He seemed to be smiling. "I didn't know that you were interested in Pokey Barrett," he said.

"I don't know what you're talking about. That was—" she stopped. No convincing lie came to her.

"I happened to be in my room. I couldn't imagine who would be ringing us up at this time of night, so I lifted the receiver."

Bridget said nothing. Her one idea was to get out of the room, out of the office, into the open, where there would be other people. She jumped for the door. Mr. Beeding's hand caught her by the arm and spun her round.

Bridget opened her mouth to scream, but the sound was still-born.

Harry Gordon had come quietly into the room. He took a couple of steps forward, flung an arm round Mr. Beeding's neck, and dragged him backward. Mr. Beeding tried, ineffectually, to turn. The arm round his neck was throttling him. He gave a choked scream.

Harry dropped his arm and stood back. As Mr. Beeding spun round, he hit him. It was a flailing, unscientific blow. It landed flat in the middle of Mr. Beeding's face, knocked his glasses off, and sent him spinning.

Harry jumped after him and gave him a push. Mr. Beeding tripped over the wastepaper basket and hit his head against the desk.

It was unskillful, undignified, and deeply satisfying to Harry who now picked up Mr. Beeding by the arms and propped him in his chair.

"What are you going to do?" said Bridget.

Mr. Beeding blinked and passed a hand across his eyes. Blood was trickling from one corner of his mouth.

"I'm going to do what I came here for," said Harry. "I'm going to have the truth out of him, if I have to kill him in the process. They can't hang me twice." He turned to Mr. Beeding and slapped him hard in the face with his open hand. "It's up to you. Do you tell us the truth, or do I break every bone in your body?"

"Neither," said Superintendent Lacey. He was blocking the doorway, and there were uniformed policemen in the passage.

"It was luck, really," said Lacey. "One of my men happened to see Gordon actually going into Beeding's office. He didn't recognize him, but he didn't think he had any business slipping into the office at that time of night, so told his Sergeant who happened to be talking to me. As soon as I heard it was Beeding's office, I thought we'd better investigate."

The Assistant Commissioner said, "Most of our best results are luck. But you have to do the hard work as well."

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"What are we going to do now?"

"Legally, it's a bit tricky. The hearing in the Appeal Court was concluded. They'll probably have to start it all over again."

"We'll have two men on the door this time," said Lacey.

Mr. Hargest Macrea, Q.C., leaned back in his chair and regarded his visitors with some astonishment. One he recognized as the attractive secretary of Mr. Beeding—Bridget Something-or-other. A girl with brains as well as looks. The other, who had introduced himself as Harbord, was apparently an official of the Royal Courts of Justice.

"It's all quite irregular," Mr. Macrea said. "I don't know what my clerk was thinking of, letting you in."

"You must blame me," said Mr. Harbord. "Mr. Tarragon is an old friend of mine. I'm afraid I persuaded him."

"Etiquette lays down that I cannot discuss the case with you without a solicitor being present."

"I'm afraid Mr. Beeding isn't feeling very well this morning."

"I read something in the papers. He was assaulted by Gordon, was he not, just before Gordon was apprehended?"

"He was certainly assaulted," said Bridget.

Mr. Macrea looked up sharply. He thought he detected a note of satisfaction in her voice.

Mr. Harbord said, "Could we get over the difficulty by pretending this isn't a conference? All we want to do is to tell you a story. If, when you've heard it, you choose to throw us out, we'll go quietly."

"Well," said Mr. Macrea, "on that understanding—"

Mr. Harbord told the story well. He started with the Stewart Barker case. At the end of it Mr. Macrea interrupted him. "Your suggestion is that a respectable solicitor forged an important piece of evidence for a female client, and thereby induced her to become his mistress. But that she turned on him. Why?"

"I should think very likely she got tired of him. And she ran short of money. Those would be two very good reasons."

"And you surmise that the litigation clerk, Mr. Henry, got to know of it?"

"It's a bit more than surmise," said Mr. Harbord. "I spent the afternoon with him. He as good as told me that Mr. Beeding was up to something. He wouldn't say what, but he implied that it had to do with the Harry Gordon case, and that Janine was mixed up in it."

"Drunken ramblings," said Macrea. "Not very reliable evidence."

"All right," said Mr. Harbord. "I agree. But the last thing he said to me was, 'I'm going to have it out with that old so-and-so Beeding. *He* won't push me around any more.' And he finished up dead in the safe in Mr. Beeding's room. Coincidence, I imagine."

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Mr. Macrea took a pinch of snuff.

"So now," he said, "we have a solicitor who is not only a forger, a perjurer, and a seducer, but also a murderer. And not just a murderer but a double murderer. For I suppose it is part of your story that he was the man Janine was going to see that night—and who shot her with the gun she had so conveniently brought along with her?"

"That's right," said Mr. Harbord. "It's cumulative, of course. One thing led to the other."

"Where does he live, by the way?"

"Staines—on the outskirts. It's a big villa, standing back in its own grounds about two hundred yards along the Chertsey Road."

Mr. Macrea had extracted a motoring map from the drawer of his desk and was making a few calculations.

"It fits in, roughly, with the mileages," he said. "Twenty-five miles from Highgate via the North Circular. That makes fifty for the return journey. Add a bit for the trip to Epping. Tell me this: when he had abandoned the car in Harry Gordon's yard—*if* he abandoned it, I mean, of course—"

"Of course," said Mr. Harbord.

"How do you suggest he got home?"

"There's no difficulty about that. He would catch the 11:50 from Waterloo to Staines. He'd probably get out at Ashford, so as not to attract attention. He could then walk home, by secondary roads and paths, in under fifty minutes."

Mr. Macrea said, "I'm puzzled, Mr. Harbord. You speak of times and places. How do you know all this?"

"A friend of mine," said Mr. Harbord, "caught the 11:50 last night and got out at Ashford. Eight other people alighted there. He walked to Mr. Beeding's house in forty-eight minutes. And he met nobody at all on the way."

"A very devoted friend."

"Oh, very," said Mr. Harbord. "I've got a number of friends. All happy to work in the cause of justice."

Mr. Macrea looked at him curiously, shifted his gaze to Bridget who was sitting beside him, her eyes alight, and then got abruptly to his feet.

"I want to be careful not to disappoint you," he said. "But I've got to say this. You've just told me a story. It could be true. There's nothing in the facts, so far as I can see, to disprove your version. In one or two particulars it fits in very neatly. But the Crown has a story, too. And, at the moment, it's their version that holds the field. It convinced a jury at the Old Bailey. And very nearly gained the approval of three judges in the Court of Appeal. Indeed, if Harry Gordon hadn't taken the law into his own hands it would have done so. What are you going to set against it? What concrete evidence have you got—

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new evidence, that wasn't available before—to make your version more convincing than theirs?" Seeing the look on Bridget's face he added, "I really am sorry to say that, but it's better I should point it out to you now."

Mr. Harbord said, "There is one person who might help us. He's a convicted criminal called Pokey Barrett, who comes up tomorrow morning at the South Thames Stipendary Magistrates Court for a burglary at Laleham. A burglary which he can't really deny, since most of the proceeds were found under a loose board in his bedroom."

"How—?"

"I can't explain the connection. But it's clear that he had something on Mr. Beeding. At least, that's the only solution I can think of which squares with the facts. He had undoubtedly stolen a silver cigarette box—"

"Which Mr. Beeding says he kept in his office," said Bridget, "but I know he didn't."

"—and a pair of gold cuff links. And possibly other things as well. Mr. Beeding neither reported their loss to the police nor made any attempt to get them back. When questioned, he even went to far as to deny that the cuff links belonged to him."

"It's odd," said Macrea, rubbing the tip of his index finger down his leathery chin, "but I still don't quite see how it's going to help us."

"It occurred to me that if you offered your services, as Counsel, to Barrett—he'd be enormously flattered, of course, to have a famous Q.C. appearing for him—then the police would have to allow you to talk to him. If you could only get out of him what he has on Mr. Beeding—"

"The whole suggestion," said Mr. Macrea, "is scandalously irregular. Nevertheless—" He touched his bell and Mr. Tarragon appeared.

"Am I doing anything tomorrow morning, Tarragon?"

Mr. Tarragon said, "Yes, sir. You're appearing for a man called Barrett, at the South Thames Court. I've just fixed it with his solicitors."

Late that evening Mr. Harbord was summoned to Macrea's house in St. John's Wood. The Q.C. apologized courteously for dragging him out and offered him a glass of port.

There was a fire of logs in the grate, still necessary on that early summer evening, and Macrea stared for a few moments into its depths before saying, "Well— I've seen Barrett. We had a long talk. There's no doubt we're on to something. It's going to be devilish difficult to handle. Legally, one of the trickiest situations I can remember. And I'm not going into it blindfold."

"No," said Mr. Harbord. "What lovely port this is."

"No credit to me. My father laid it down. I just drink it—with reverent appreciation. I want to know where you come into this. And my

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clerk. He's clearly hand-in-glove with you. And that girl. The whole story."

"Very well," said Mr. Harbord.

A quarter of an hour later Macrea said, "I've never heard anything like it in my life. I'm half sorry I made you tell me. It makes the thing even more explosive."

"Do you believe," said Mr. Harbord, "that Harry Gordon killed Janine Mann?"

"No," said Macrea. "I don't."

"Do you believe that Beeding did kill her?"

"I'm beginning to think it's very likely."

"Then your duty in the matter is clear."

Macrea sighed. He reflected that it was a rarity nowadays to find a man with clear, hard, uncompromising ideas of right and wrong. Once upon a time there had been more of them about. They had founded empires, started new religions, and executed evil kings. He sighed once again.

"It's lucky we've got old Holland sitting tomorrow," he said. "He's pretty broad-minded. I'll have to tell him, in outline, what I plan to do. And we'd better tip off the press. This is a case where publicity is going to be a great help."

Regulars at the South London Court were astounded. Apart from those professionally engaged, the morning attendance rarely exceeded a dozen in the public part of the court, and a couple of reporters. On this particular morning they found some difficulty in getting in at all. Latecomers were actually excluded from the Court.

Those who did get in observed that the press benches were full to overflowing; and that a number of men whom they had never seen before, and who appeared somewhat out of their element in those surroundings, were seated on the benches normally reserved for solicitors and counsel.

"What's it all about?" said Burroughs, of the *Morning News* to his neighbor.

"No idea. We were told there was some tie-up with the Gordon case. Might be nothing in it, but we couldn't risk missing anything."

Burroughs nodded. The escape and recapture had elevated Harry Gordon to a position above Prime Ministers or pop singers.

"Isn't that old Macrea coming in?"

"That's right. It is. That's Superintendent Lacey—in the bowler hat—and isn't that Beeding the solicitor? There *is* something in it then."

Mr. Holland entered. The Court rose, and subsided. Mr. Holland, who looked like an intelligent parrot and had a croaking voice to match, said, "I understand, Mr. Macrea, that you have an application to make."

"I'm obliged," said Macrea, climbing to his feet. "I appear for Sidney

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Arthur Barrett, charged with burglary at Laleham on March 15th last. Mr. Pellow is with me."

"Yes, Mr. Macrea."

"I have an application to make, and I understand from the clerk that it will be convenient to take it first."

"Certainly, Mr. Macrea. Where is the accused?"

The policeman nearest the door shouted, "Barrett." The door was opened, and the prisoner came in. He was a scruffy, cheerful, insignificant little man who appeared gratified by the public attention focused on him. He grinned at a friend in the public benches and was hustled into the dock.

"The position," said Macrea, "is somewhat unusual. I was instructed at a late hour yesterday, and I have only had an opportunity of one conference with my client—"

Mr. Barrett smiled in a gratified way.

"Nevertheless, my instructions are quité clear. He has indicated that he is prepared to plead guilty to the offense as charged—on condition that three other offenses are taken into consideration at the same time."

"If he wishes to plead guilty, the plea should be made to the Assizes when the case comes up."

"I appreciate that," said Macrea. "But if he withdraws his plea, then preliminary proceedings will have to take place here, will they not?"

"I don't think he can bargain with the Court."

"In the normal way," said Macrea, "I should respectfully agree. The time for considering other offenses is after sentence has been passed. But there is a further complication here. One of the offenses which my client particularly wishes to have taken into consideration is alleged by the police never to have taken place."

There was a moment's silence. Mr. Holland looked at the police solicitor who half rose to his feet. Before he could speak, Macrea intervened.

"If you would allow me," he said, "to indicate, very briefly the nature, of the dispute between my client and the police—"

For a breathless moment Mr. Holland considered the matter. He knew that what was being suggested was completely irregular—but he also knew Macrea.

He said, " Very well, Mr. Macrea."

"My client," said Macrea, "tells me—indeed, he insists—that he carried out a burglary at a house outside Staines on the night of November 16th. He is quite clear about the date, which happens to be both his birthday and his wedding anniversary."

"Married twenty-two years," said Barrett, "and never a hard word."

"You'll have an opportunity of addressing the Court later," said Mr. Holland. "Go on, Mr. Macrea."

"It also stuck in his memory because the owner of the house, as he found out afterwards, was one of

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the persons involved—indirectly involved—in the Harry Gordon murder case. A murder alleged to have been committed on November 16th."

The heads on the press benches jerked up in unison. On the other side of the Court, Mr. Beeding turned as red as if a spotlight had opened on him. Then the color drained slowly out of his face, leaving it whiter than before.

"It was the house of a Mr. Alfred Beeding, the solicitor appearing in that case. My client described to me in some detail how he watched this particular house from nine o'clock onwards. It was not a very comfortable vigil since it was raining hard, but he was afraid to enter the house since Mr. Beeding was apparently entertaining a visitor who, he feared, might emerge at any moment. The visitor's car, a red Aston-Martin, was parked outside the front door."

The reporters' pencils squeaked and scurried.

Macrea, who could sense that the sands of Mr. Holland's patience were running out fast, hurried on. "At about a quarter past ten, however, my client saw Mr. Beeding emerge. His visitor—a lady—appeared to be in the last stages of drink, since he had to drag her to the car—"

"Really, Mr. Macrea," said Mr. Holland, "I hardly think this is the time and place—"

Out of the corner of his eye Macrea saw Mr. Beeding get to his feet and push his way to the door. The reporters saw it, too. With one accord they rose to their feet and stampeded toward the exit.

Burroughs had the lead by a short head. He got through the front door of the Court as Mr. Beeding reached his car. He ran across. "Would you care to make any comment?" he said, and this was as far as he got.

Mr. Beeding shook him off, jumped into the car, and started the engine. The car shot away.

Burroughs scampered to the nearest telephone.

"Do you think it was an accident?" said the Assistant Commissioner.

"It's difficult to say," said Lacey. "He was evidently making for his house. By all accounts he was driving much too quickly. It was pouring rain, and the road was greasy. He couldn't turn the corner just short of his house. Went over the bank and into the river."

"Yes," said the Assistant Commissioner. He was thinking what a curious part rain had played in the whole story. If it hadn't been a vile night on November 16th, when Harry Gordon started out after Janine—if he hadn't bogged his car in Epping Forest—if the road outside Mr. Beeding's house hadn't been slippery—

"One thing's certain," said the Assistant Commissioner. "No one's going to believe Harry Gordon did it. Not now."

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"What puzzles me," said Lacey, "is how they got Pokey to help them. Without money they wouldn't have got far."

"He hadn't much to lose," said the Assistant Commissioner. "The Laleham job was open and shut. He was going down on that for a certainty. And he knew we were on to the others. So it was sensible to bring them in. Of course, he might have had other reasons, too. He might have had strong ethical objections to capital punishment."

One of the difficulties with the A.C., Superintendent Lacey had found, was to know when he was joking. On this occasion he felt quite safe in laughing.

The Lord Chief Justice addressed the figure in the dock.

"In all the circumstances," he said, "and having regard to every possible contention so ably put forward by Counsel on your behalf and having considered the new evidence now brought forward —"

Harry glanced at the policeman beside him. He was, he noticed, a particularly large and wide-awake policeman.

"—we have come to the unanimous conclusion that the conviction and sentence in this case cannot stand."

The policeman was grinning.

"We therefore direct that the prisoner be set at liberty. Usher, kindly restrain those people in the public gallery. This is not a theatrical performance."

Outside the door, at the foot of the stairs, Harry found Bridget waiting for him.

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Box Score for 1963

In editing his second volume of the BEST DETECTIVE STORIES OF THE YEAR (published in July 1964 by E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc.), Anthony Boucher selected 17 stories as the best, and listed 99 others in his Honor Roll of 1963—a total of 116 distinguished stories of which one appeared only in book form. Here is the box score for the 115 best detective stories published in American magazines during 1963:

name of magazine	*Honor Roll stories*	*percentage*
Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine	59	51.3%
The Saint Mystery Magazine	16	13.9%
Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine	11	9.6%
Rogue	5	4.3%
Playboy	4	3.5%
Manhunt	3	2.6%
Saturday Evening Post	3	2.6%
Cosmopolitan	2	1.7%
Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine	2	1.7%
Monocle	2	1.7%
New Yorker	2	1.7%
Argosy	1	.9%
Bridge World	1	.9%
Eros	1	.9%
Fantastic	1	.9%
McCall's	1	.9%
This Week	1	.9%

In 1962, EQMM's percentage of Honor Roll stories of the year was 43.6%. In 1963, it was 51.3%. In other words, more than one-half of all the distinguished mystery stories published last year in American magazines appeared in EQMM; and this does not include the bonus of excellent reprints, both short stories and short novels, which EQMM offers every month . . .

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